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The American University in Cairo

**Alternative Causes of Civil War Onset – Repression and Signals From
External Actors: A Comparative Case Study of Bahrain and Syria**

A Thesis Submitted by

Katherine Ann Kassanitz

To Department of Political Science

May, 2016

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

The degree of Master of Arts

Has been approved by


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April 2016

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Half a decade has now passed since a series of protests, most commonly referred to as the Arab Spring, erupted across the Middle East and North Africa. In late December 2010, the world watched with anticipation as the beginning of these uprisings started rapidly unfolding in Tunisia after street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself aflame due to his ongoing indignation towards the oppressive actions regularly inflicted upon him by police forces. By resorting to self-immolation, one of the most extreme forms of political expression, he single-handedly drew statewide recognition towards the corrupt policies and injustices of the government. His death was the catalytic force that prompted thousands of Tunisians to take to the street demanding respect, democratic reforms and equal rights for all citizens. This pivotal moment sent sheer panic throughout the entire MENA region, as other Arab leaders befittingly feared that the infectious contagion of mass mobilization would eventually spread to their own countries, and it most certainly did. The unifying theme that initially linked all the movements together was dissidents' strong opposition towards longstanding, exploitative authoritarian rule and their intense desires for better social, economic and political rights.

Background of the Problem

As five years have gone by since the beginning of this historic period where citizens residing in this vicinity of the world actively engaged in protests against their governments, clear observations can finally be made which highlight how the aftermath of these uprisings significantly vary from country to country despite originally stemming from shared grievances that transcended across state borders. The Arab Spring has ended the reign of certain country's most enduring dictators and ignited widespread violence in others, while a handful of regimes successfully maintained their stronghold on power. This has resulted in a multitude of studies attempting to explain which causal mechanisms are responsible for these divergent outcomes. A common trend that has developed within the academic community has tended to focus on the countries in this region that exhibit several shared characteristics in order to juxtapose them against one another to find the few crucial traits in which they differ. By doing this, scholars aim to directly pinpoint the infinitesimal, but nevertheless substantially important dissimilarities

that exist amongst these states that display seemingly identical qualities, as they are then believed to be the explanatory variables needed that can account for the contrasting outcomes of the protest movements.

For instance, numerous research inquiries have revolved around trying to understand the reasons why the transition to democracy proved more successful in Tunisia than in Egypt as they each have a shared history of maintaining a secular order, similar population demographics with a Sunni Muslim majority and once the uprisings broke out, the military personnel in both countries each chose to back the protesters whilst abandoning their loyalty to the regime. Also, before the events of late 2010 occurred, it may have appeared to the outside world that Egypt and Tunisia, although well-known autocracies, were at least governed by more liberal constitutions that permitted multiparty elections and bestowed citizens with civil liberties. However, these images portrayed to the international community were merely cosmetic, as those rights were simply overturned by these regimes who then meticulously engineered their consolidation of power over the presidency and ruling parties.¹ But now that an ample amount of time has passed since the protest movements erupted, key differences have been identified between the two countries which are thought to be the reasons behind Tunisia's successful transition to democracy compared to its alleged counterpart, Egypt. The factors that are attributed to these disparate outcomes are the size and the role of the military in each country, in addition to the manner in which the incumbent regimes decided to treat Islamist groups enmeshed within the general public.² In Tunisia, the military was purposely kept diminutive and frail unlike the highly populous Egyptian army that plays a significant role in society. Also, although both countries banned Islamist organizations from legally assembling, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was given more leeway to publicly gather and vie for seats in parliamentary elections, albeit as independents, whereas in Tunisia the law was strictly abided by and known Islamists

¹ Leila Hilal, "Charting Transitions in the Middle East: Lessons Learned from Tunisia and Egypt," *Insight Turkey* 14, no. 2 (2012): 2.

²Paul Kubicek and Laura K. Landolt, "Opportunities and Constraints: Comparing Tunisia and Egypt to the Coloured Revolutions," *Democratization* 21, no. 6 (2014): 989.

were completely suppressed or exiled.³ Therefore, during the transitional period in Egypt after Mubarak stepped down, the Islamists cozied up to the military who were in grave fear of loosing their entrenched role in the economy which prompted SCAF, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, to hijack the constitutional reform process to protect their monetary interests while simultaneously granting the Muslim Brotherhood exemption from the input of the secular oppositionists.⁴ Whereas the Islamist party in Tunisia, the Ennahda, were more eager and willing to work with civil society in ousting regime loyalists from participating in the process of restructuring the constitution which is cited as the reason why Tunisia has had a more successful transition to democracy than Egypt.

Another popular research topic pertains to the uprisings that occurred in Libya and Yemen, as scholars have focused their efforts on making sense of why NATO forces intervened in the former case but were absent in the latter despite all the similar features between these countries as well as their nearly identical responses towards brutally repressing the protest movements that took place within their borders. In both nations, rampant corruption is omnipresent, tribal affiliations are of utmost importance even taking precedence over religious and political propinquities and finally, citizens are presided over by nepotistic governing structures.⁵ In addition to this, the Libyan and Yemeni armed forces were instructed to blatantly slaughter unarmed citizens believed to be against the regime. But the United Nations Security Council only gave the go-ahead for NATO forces to actively intervene in Libya under the guise of “humanitarian intervention” to help protect civilians. Various speculations have attributed this decision to Libyan dictator, Muammar Gaddafi’s overall unpopularity with a great number of world leaders who were eagerly awaiting his demise. Whereas in Yemen, the Saleh regime was viewed as an ally to the West and an avid supporter of the ‘war against terror’.⁶ Other studies have alluded to the presence of petroleum reserves as the real

³Leila Hilal, “Charting Transitions in the Middle East: Lessons Learned from Tunisia and Egypt,” 3.

⁴Michael Makara, “Coups-Proofing, Military Defection, and the Arab Spring,” *Democracy and Security* 9, no. 4 (2013): 347.

⁵Zoltan Barany, “The Role of the Military,” *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 4 (2011): 33.

⁶Berdal Aral, “Roaring in Libya, Whispering in Others: UN Security Council’s Posture During the ‘Arab Spring’,” *Insight Turkey* 16, no. 1 (2014): 187.

reason why NATO decided to get involved in the domestic affairs of Libya, but not Yemen.

Statement of the Problem

One highly underexamined case is that of the unlikely pair, Bahrain and Syria. On the surface, comparing these countries based on their similarities may seem like a paradoxical task, but after thoroughly examining their attributes, they actually have more in common than what meets the eye. Both nations encompass specific qualities that substantially distinguish them from the rest of the countries engulfed by the Arab Spring. In short, Bahrain and Syria have highly heterogeneous populations that are split along ethnic and religious lines, both ruling regimes are minority groups challenged with governing over a dominant majority and finally, they each responded in a similar manner to the originally peaceful protests by briefly opting for mild concessions quickly followed by violent repression. Also, during the beginning months of the uprisings prominent external actors remained initially silent and unwilling to vehemently speak out against the atrocities being committed by the Bahraini and Syrian military forces against innocent, unarmed civilians legally exercising their right to protest.

But mentioning the role of external actors would not be complete without discussing the part played by the security apparatuses of the Gulf Cooperation Council in Bahrain's uprising, as certain scholars have accredited their intervention as the sole reason why Bahrain was able to crush the momentum of the protest movements, but this is not the case. The 1,500-membered troop, comprised of men from the UAE's military and the Saudi Arabian National Guard, was sent to Bahrain to provide the essential backbone needed to free-up the Bahraini Defense Forces from safeguarding important infrastructure so they could focus all their efforts on brutally repressing their own citizens.⁷ The coercive forces of the regime were the ones mercilessly striking demonstrators and eliminating them from the streets by any means possible. This is why the GCC intervention is not responsible for "saving" Bahrain from breakdown. At best, the crackdown on protesters might have taken a longer time without GCC support, but

⁷Fawaz A. Gerges, ed. *The New Middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 337.

nonetheless the state still would have triumphed.⁸

For that reason, the empirical puzzle still remains as to why Bahrain was successful at quelling oppositional forces while Syria descended into the onset of civil war?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to uncover the causal mechanisms which are to blame for the drastically different outcomes in Bahrain and Syria. Given their unique, shared country-specific characteristics, the identical responses they took against protesters and the similar reactions from the international community during the initial phases of the unrest, it seemed exceedingly probable to predict that the aftermath of the uprisings would have at least borne a slight resemblance to one another. Since this has evidently not been the case, it makes for an interesting research opportunity to investigate how two highly overlooked factors, repression and signals, can impact whether or not a protest movement will result in civil war onset or not.

The decision to focus on the role of repression stems from the fact that only in Bahrain did this misuse of state power manage to subdue dissidents while in Syria it escalated the level of violence to the onset of civil war. Therefore, the specific types of repression tactics carried out must vary on certain aspects which produced these divergent outcomes. The reason for concentrating on signals, understood as statements of support or condemnation by external actors, has to do with the way in which they commented on the atrocities being committed by the state security forces in both countries. As the protest movements progressed, prominent foreign actors sent signals of support to the al-Khalifa regime in Bahrain while in Syria several denounced the behavior of the al-Assad administration and threatened to act if other nonviolent approaches were not adopted to mitigate the rising hostilities. These opposing reactions affected the strategic calculations of both opposition groups differently which made them either more eager or reluctant to resort to violent means to achieve their goals.

In order to address the reason why civil war broke out in Syria but not Bahrain, a comparative case study will be carried out to test for causation regarding the independent

⁸Brownlee, Masoud and Reynolds, *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform*, 86, 90.

variable, repression, as well as the intermediate variable, signals from external actors, to see if they had a deterring or escalatory effect on the protest movements which led to the absence or presence of civil war onset.

Significance of the Study

This research is important because it will contribute to the civil war onset literature by analyzing the understudied roles that repression and signals play in influencing the likelihood that a country will descend into this type of intrastate conflict. By comparing the cases of Bahrain and Syria, it allows for a more comprehensive assessment of the impact that the independent variable of repression and intermediate variable of signals have on transforming protest movements into or away from the onset of civil war. Previous studies have assessed a multitude of diverse factors thought to play a part in the commencement of violence that ensues between a government and its domestic opposition.

The most generic explanations center around the greed versus grievance debate, as proponents of the former are more focused on the opportunity for rebellion whereas the latter emphasizes the level of citizen's overall dissatisfaction with the state which propels people to take up arms against their government. Another commonly cited factor thought to trigger civil war onset is the role of identity, but this has been rather difficult to prove empirically. Ethnicity and religious affiliation are the two most popular components of this umbrella term and although they are influential tools for mobilizing forces they have not been found to be the root cause of conflict. This is primarily because it is challenging to ascertain that a civil war occurred based purely on issues of identity, as the real cause is actually due to a shared struggle over a lack of specific socio-economic resources which generates onset. An additional trend has been to highlight certain attributes of a country that are believed to make them more susceptible to experiencing this kind of intrastate violence. Some popularly mentioned features are related to demographic factors such as population size or density, mountainous terrain and the presence of natural resources. All of these aforementioned reasons represent the most generally cited factors thought to trigger civil war onset. Although these structural

models are useful for predicting which countries are more prone to civil war, they lack the ability to determine when this type of conflict will break out.

This thesis will take a process-oriented approach in understanding how the onset of civil war occurs by exemplifying how this type of intrastate conflict builds up through a dynamic interaction between a state, its dissidents and external actors to reach this threshold of violence. Analyzing these lesser known causal mechanisms of repression and signals hopes to provide policymakers with the tools necessary for better predicting when, and not simply where, hostilities in a specific country are in danger of escalating to the onset of civil war.

Repression is a vital independent variable to study because whenever a government perceives a challenge to its authority they are likely to respond with oppressive measures against their adversaries. This is known as the “Law of Coercive Responsiveness” which almost guarantees that a regime will react to an emerging uprising with violent force. What is interesting though is that, historically, the use of state repression has led to mixed results, as in some instances it was successful at defeating the opposition while in others it accelerated the violence to the onset of civil war. Therefore, it is crucial to understand that state repression is not a homogenous type of behavior but rather one that entails multiple forms of coercion which have a varying impact on the outcome of protest movements. Investigating the multiple varieties of repression will pinpoint the types which are responsible for increasing or decreasing the momentum of uprisings.

The other fundamental intermediate variable that will be examined are signals which will be defined as statements made by external actors. Signals are important factors to pay attention to because they reveal extremely telling messages to governments and their domestic opponents as to what side should expect to receive foreign support if the conflict metastasized into a civil war. Previous research has tended to treat this type of internal violence as purely domestic in nature, neglecting the transnational dynamics that play a crucial role in effecting the direction of protests. Although signals from external actors will vary based on the type and target of repression tactics being carried out, they still contribute to causing a variation in the dependent variable which is the presence or absence of civil war onset. In addition, assessing the role of signals will allow

international relations scholarship to be applied to intrastate conflict studies to offer a more in-depth conception of how third-parties can influence the direction of protest movements into or away from civil war onset.

Primary Research Question

To reiterate, the primary research question that will be addressed in this thesis, is what were the specific causal mechanisms that resulted in the different outcomes of the Arab Spring uprisings that took place in Bahrain and Syria?

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis is that the differences in the type and target of repression are the reasons why the Bahraini regime was able to quell dissidents while the Syrian forces only upped the level of mobilization throughout the entire country resulting in the onset of civil war.

The second hypothesis is that the specific type and target of repression caused a variation in the signals from external actors, determining if they were sent in support of the regime or its opposition which influenced both parties' decision making processes in deciding to come to mutual agreements or opt for incurring the costs of going to war with one another.

Research Design

The methodology that will be used in testing these two hypotheses is a comparative case study of the uprisings that occurred in Bahrain and Syria during the timeframe of January 2011 to January 2012. The decision to compare only these two cases was due to the fact that no other Arab Spring countries exhibited the unique attributes as the ones found in Bahrain and Syria which provided a rare opportunity to examine the highly understudied roles of repression and signals from external actors. Although the comparative case study approach is constrained by the "many variables small N" problem, if properly applied it can compete with rival methods. The most similar systems design is used to match Bahrain and Syria based on all the important common features they share which are not central to this study, in effect controlling for them and thus reducing the many variables issue. This technique has an advantage over

large-N, cross-case methodologies where each and every single relevant control variable is assigned a precise ranking commonly based on strong assumptions regarding the underlying causal relationship.⁹

Material from primary source data will be critically analyzed and compared against one another to test the hypotheses in order to see if the independent variable of repression and the intermediate variable of signals have explanatory power in accounting for the different outcomes of the uprisings that took place in Bahrain and Syria. The resources explicitly concerning the repression tactics of both regimes will be obtained through country-specific reports on Bahrain and Syria from the Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, the UN Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the U.S. State Department during the timeframe from January 2011 until January 2012. In addition, datasets from the Political Terror Scale's archives, which measures the level of state violence, will be used as well.

The type of signals to be examined are formal statements made by external actors and international organizations that proclaimed either their support or condemnation of the regimes or their opposition that will be obtained through textual documents, country-specific reports, public speeches and adopted resolutions or attempted resolutions. These groups consist of one intergovernmental organization, the United Nations, two regional organizations, the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council and one governmental organization, the U.S. State Department. Also, statements from two of the most powerful heads of state during this timeframe, current President of the United States, Barack Obama and former King of Saudi Arabia, the late Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, will be analyzed because of the critical role they played in shaping the direction of the uprising through their vocal declarations which either supported or denounced the Bahraini and Syrian regimes or their opposition.

The signals from external actors in Iran and Russia are not included in this analysis for several reasons. The first is that the Russian regime basically did not acknowledge or even bother to really comment on the situation in Bahrain and Iran

⁹John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 131-133.

eventually followed suit in favor of focusing their attention on the Syrian uprising instead. Therefore, the signals each country made about Bahrain had relatively little impact on the direction of the protest movement in this country. In Syria on the other hand, they were the only two staunch supporters of the al-Assad regime who wanted to see Bashar remain in power but were significantly undermined by the rest of the international communities' efforts which signaled to the oppositional forces that they had a plethora of outside supporters that would aid them should the situation continue to escalate. This is why although the Iranian and Syrian regimes sent costly pro-government signals in the forms of monetary aid and arms shipment that, according to signaling theory, should cause dissidents to back down and refrain from further conflict with the state, was not the case because they were outnumbered by almost all states in the international system who were adamantly against the Syrian regime and continued to up the number of cheap anti-government signals that overpowered the costly signals from these two countries.

Theoretical Framework

The foundational theories used to guide the direction of this research are escalation and signaling theory. They were chosen because they yield greater explanatory power in demonstrating how the roles of repression and signals can influence and cause civil war onset to ensue compared to other theoretical perspectives more focused on greed versus grievance type factors. Within escalation theory lies the inflammation hypothesis which predicts that civil war onset is the result of the specific type and intensity of the repression tactics carried out by the state which mobilizes citizens to up their rebellious efforts.¹⁰ By responding to initially nonviolent movements with violent force the state causes its dissidents to view normal channels for initiating political change as closed while simultaneously increasing their grievances and thus, their willingness to fight. Therefore, repression is an intricate element that is enmeshed in the multifaceted process leading to the onset of civil war which should not be ignored. The key to

¹⁰Armstrong II, David A., Christian Davenport and Mark I. Lichbach, "Conflict Escalation and the Origins of Civil War" (Working Paper, University of Maryland, 2006), 35, 36.

understanding how this type of intrastate violence emerges lies within identifying the escalatory path which leads from one form of conflict to the next. Moving on to the second framework, signaling theory places an emphasis on the often overlooked transnational features that can influence whether or not a country will descend into civil war onset. When foreign actors make simple statements showing their support or disapproval of a regime or its opposition based on their actions towards one another, it affects the decision making processes of both parties in deciding whether or not to come to a mutual agreement to end the rising tensions or opt for resorting to continued violence instead.¹¹

Limitations

Since it is nearly impossible to apply a strict application of the most similar systems design, as it would require that cases be selected based on a specified number of factors that only varied in their outcome and one single explanatory variable, which is why a looser application of this was employed when choosing to compare Bahrain and Syria. Despite not being able to systematically match the cases on all the relevant control variables, it still permits for a thorough examination to be conducted to see if a causal relationship exists between the independent and dependent variables.

Delimitations

This study is solely focused on the uprisings that occurred in Bahrain and Syria during the timeframe from January 2011 until January 2012 because it was within this period that the protest movements were either successfully defeated or the onset of civil war had begun. Limiting this study to one year instead of stretching it out over a five-year span will provide more informative data on how repression and signals from external actors caused the varying outcomes in each country. Furthermore, the decision for using these two factors as the casual mechanisms thought to shape the way protest movements will turn out is because several other explanatory variables have been constantly reproduced in multiple studies leading to relatively similar conclusions. The cases of

¹¹Clayton Lynn Thyne, "Cheap Signals, Costly Consequences: How International Relations Affect Civil Conflict" (PhD. dissertation, University of Iowa, 2007), 30-38.

Bahrain and Syria were chosen based on the several shared country-specific characteristics that they both exhibit, such as their highly heterogeneous populations and the fact that both regimes are minority groups governing over a dominant majority, which made them unique compared to the rest of the Arab Spring countries. Also, the manner in which they both responded to the originally nonviolent protests with brutal repression and the initial reluctance of the international community to publically condemn the barbarities being committed made them an even better case for comparison to understand how the aftermath of both uprisings have led to the completely different situations each country is in today.

Definition of Terms

Although the onset of civil war is difficult to operationalize, for the purpose of this thesis specific criteria will be used in order to attempt to give it a more concrete definition. One of the first factors is that an armed conflict must take place in a country with a minimum population of 500,000 between the national government and at least one insurgency group. Secondly, effective resistance by both sides is a must and the anti-regime rebels must be militarily organized as well as having publically stated political aspirations.¹² But one of the biggest problems in determining when the onset of civil war occurs is related to the specific death threshold that must be exceeded for a conflict to be labeled as such. An additional problem arises in regards to whether or not only battle-related deaths should be included or if civilian casualties should be counted as well.

The standard model for measuring the intensity of internal conflict focuses on the total number of deaths to see if it exceeds a specific threshold, normally 1,000 casualties in a given year, as another vital factor that determines when the onset of civil war occurs. But using the absolute number of deaths instead of the number of casualties standardized by population size biases findings against conflicts in smaller nations as this threshold is applied to countries whose population sizes are extremely heterogeneous.¹³ Therefore,

¹² Nicholas Sambanis, "What is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 6 (2004): 816.

¹³ Hannes Mueller, "Growth and Violence: Argument for a Per Capita Measure of Civil War" (Working Paper Series, no. 756, Barcelona Graduate School of Economics, 2014), 2.

although this method shows the correlation between the structural characteristics of countries and the onset of civil war, it does not accurately capture the specific country-by-country variations that might lead to onset in certain cases. As a solution to this problem, using the number of deaths in relation to the population size of a country during a one-year period would capture the violence intensity in casualties per capita instead of the absolute number of overall deaths. This would make it less likely to overlook armed conflicts taking place in smaller nations that produce fewer deaths but are nonetheless dramatically significant.¹⁴ But establishing a proper per capita measure is difficult and labor intensive.

Therefore, the death threshold that must be exceeded in Bahrain is relaxed to 25 battle-related and civilian casualties in a given year while in Syria it is increased to 1,000 to better accurately account for the variance in their population sizes. Although Bahrain's population is only 600,000 while Syria's is 22 million, it is still possible to compare these countries and see if the death thresholds in each amount to the number needed to be labeled as the onset of civil war. Now although the Bahraini Independent Commission of Inquiry recorded 35 deaths during the uprising starting from February 14, 2011 until April 15, 2011 in which 18 civilian deaths were attributed to security forces, 1 police officer death was attributed to the Bahraini Defense Force, 3 security force member deaths were attributed to demonstrators and 8 civilian deaths were not attributable to any specific perpetrator, it does still not qualify as the onset of civil war.¹⁵ This is because it does not meet the other criteria previously mentioned above, such as the fact that an armed insurgency group must have formed and been actively engaged in violent conflict with the state. While in Syria, towards the the last few months of the uprising, the Free Syrian Army was established which actively and effectively targeted members of the Syrian regime's security forces, killing a significant amount of them. By the end of December 2011, the death toll was estimated around 5,000 which included members from

¹⁴ Ibid, 11-12.

¹⁵ ¹⁵ Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry* (Presented in Manama, Bahrain, November 23, 2011), 220.

the regime's security forces and insurgents caused by battle-related death in addition to civilian casualties as well. Therefore, although the international community did not immediately declare the situation in Syria as a civil war, does not mean that it did not begin during this timeframe.

Overview of Chapters to Come

This thesis will consist of six main chapters. In Chapter 2, a review of the literature will be presented to show how previous researchers have used other variables in their efforts towards explaining how the onset of civil war occurs. A more focused examination will be given to the literature that is more relevant in regards to the independent and intermediate variables of repression and signals. Chapter 3 will consist of a detailed description of the theoretical perspectives adopted followed by a discussion of the methodology and research design which will include how the data was collected, defined and analyzed. Chapters 4 will be solely dedicated to the information on Bahrain while Chapter 5 will be designated exclusively for the material found on Syria. Finally, Chapter 6 will provide a brief overview of the entire thesis, a few concluding remarks about the level of success of the study and future recommendations for upcoming scholars interested in understanding the causes of civil war onset.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the post-WWII era, civil wars have become the most common type of conflict occurring in more than 70 countries since 1945 and lasting on average for a period longer than seven years.¹⁶ This type of intrastate violence that takes place between a government and at least one opposition group has detrimental, long-lasting effects on the wellbeing of a country and its people. The direct consequences can be seen in rising death tolls of civilians, through the destruction of infrastructure and arable land while future effects will likely result in a decline in foreign investment and economic growth, in addition to the enduring psychological impact on citizens living in these unfortunate conditions. But civil wars do not only effect the internal dynamics of a state, as the influx of refugees in surrounding countries can create severe, problematic situations for host nations as they may not be financially quipped to house over a specified number of people within their borders. Also, the probability that refugees will become stricken with communicable diseases significantly increases due to their poor living conditions and lack of access to food or water which creates another risk that neighboring countries must endure.¹⁷ According to the United Nations Human Rights Council, by the end of 2006, the number of people they had listed under the moniker, “persons of concern” (which included refugees and internally displaced persons) almost hit the 33 million mark, an outstanding number to say the least.¹⁸

Why the topic is important

Understanding the causes leading to the onset of civil war is imperative because of the devastating consequences they have domestically as well as the security threat they pose to nearby countries. Their destructive nature and inherent persistence overtime throughout various states has led scholars to vigorously study the causal mechanisms that produce this type of intrastate conflict. Therefore, it is important to continue to carry out

¹⁶ Stergios Skaperdas, “The Costs of Organized Violence: A Review of the Evidence” (CESifo Working Paper Series No. 2704, July 2009).

¹⁷ Hazem Adam Ghobarah, Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, “The Post-War Public Health Effects of Civil Conflict,” *Social Sciences and Medicines* 59, no. 4 (2005): 870.

¹⁸ Stergios Skaperdas, “The Costs of Organized Violence: A Review of the Evidence” (CESifo Working Paper Series No. 2704, July 2009).

these analytical investigations to garner a more comprehensive understanding of the multiple causes thought to trigger civil war onset with the hopes of preventing these situations in the future.

The Purpose of the Literature Review

After the Cold War, a surge in studies regarding the onset, duration and outcome of civil war were guided by new theoretical perspectives that were all tested using different empirical designs which claimed to hold the answers as to why countries become engulfed in internal warfare. Due to the multitude of variables that were put forth during this period, it is beneficial to have a solid background knowledge about these various explanations. This review will therefore highlight the most commonly cited theories and their approaches towards testing them empirically. It will then exemplify how studying the highly overlooked factors of repression and signals from external actors will fill a gap in the literature.

Scope of the review

This review will focus specifically on the civil war onset literature while disregarding other work more focused on explaining the duration and outcome of civil war. It will be organized thematically based on the prominent theoretical perspectives that have shaped the way people understand and study civil war today.

Organizational Pattern of the Review

The first theoretical frameworks that will be discussed are the ones which initially paved the way for civil war onset scholars. Although they have largely been discredited now, it is vital to know the history of how the current literature came to be. Therefore, a brief overview of greed and grievance theories will be reviewed to emphasize how they were more fixated on using structural characteristics to explain the onset of civil war. Then it will transition over to newer work dedicated to showing how repression and transnational features can also produce this type of intrastate conflict as well.

Causes of Civil War Onset

Grievance Theories

Throughout the number of grievance-based theories regarding the onset of civil war, the fundamental message of them all is that when citizens become so discontent with the unjust policies of the government they decide to mobilize and take up arms against the state in order to initiate their desired changes. One of the earliest theories of this kind dates back to the 1970s with Ted Gurr's relative deprivation theory. He developed this concept when he was attempting to address the reason why men rebel. According to him it is through a three-stage process in which political violence ensues. The beginning phase occurs when citizens start to acquire extreme dissatisfactions with the state and overtime these frustrations eventually morph into highly politicized issues. This is the tipping point that engenders citizens to engage in violent confrontations with the regime. The root source of these grievances stem from what Gurr terms, 'relative deprivation', defined as "a perceived discrepancy between men's value expectations and their value capabilities".¹⁹ In other words, when a person feels robbed of something in which they believe they are entitled to over others who already possess whatever that something may be, they are experiencing feelings of relative deprivation.

Another more recently developed grievance-based theory which furthers Gurr's position is that put forth by Frances Stewart in his research on horizontal inequalities and civil war onset. He defines horizontal inequalities as disparities that exist among culturally-defined groups that provoke people to rally against the state to change the specific policies in place that negatively impacting their lives. Although Stewart is cognizant that inherent cultural differences alone are not enough to initiate this kind of violent outbreak as his theory acknowledges that when fighting occurs along ethnic lines the underlying reasons can almost always be reduced to inequalities that exist in the distribution of economic, political and/or social power.²⁰ Racial, religious, ethnic and even immigrant categories are classified under the umbrella term of 'culturally-defined groups' which may feel the impact of these horizontal inequalities. In the economic sense, these inequities can be found in the differences of income or employment

¹⁹ Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 13.

²⁰ Frances Stewart, "Crisis Prevention: Tackling Horizontal Inequalities," *Oxford Development Studies* 28, no. 2 (2000): 247-248.

opportunities, in the social realm as disparities in the accessibility to various public services and in the political sphere as a lack of entryway into any government position of power. The onset of civil war will occur when these culturally-defined group identities coincide with the perceived inequalities that they harbor towards one another which mobilizes them to forcefully unite against the regime.²¹

These two grievance-based theories that were built on the concepts of relative deprivation and horizontal inequalities helped pave the way for civil war onset studies because they identified some of the reasons why citizens would opt for engaging in violent combat with the state due to their perceived injustices. But the studies that have been conducted on their behalf are measuring levels of *actual* inequalities that exist, while these theories specifically state that people decide to go to war with the state based on their own *perceptions* of inequality and their relative position towards others in society, rather than on *actual* observed measures of inequality. It is extremely difficult to collect, measure and conceptualize citizen's *perceived* grievances which is why these types of theories have lost their prominence in the field today.

Greed Theories

Civil war onset theories that are founded on the idea of greed as a motivating factor, posit that this type of intrastate conflict will occur when rebels' perceived benefits are greater than the costs of rebelling against the state. Greed-proponents have measured these concepts in a number of various ways, but this review will only focus on the research conducted by two of the most well-known experts on the topic, Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, whose main goal is to illustrate that greed or economic-based factors elicit civil war onset not citizen's grievances. In their studies, the cost of rebellion, probability of successful rebellion and benefits of rebellion are all proxied by numerous variables in order to draw inferences about the rebels' expected behavior and motives.²²

For potential rebels, the cost of rebellion is determined by two factors, the first being how much income they would lose if they decided to go to war which is proxied by the current per capita income of the state. The second aspect pertains to the costs of

²¹ Ibid, 246.

coordination as secrecy and trust are necessary conditions when plotting a rebellion and these are measured by population size and cultural distinctness which proxied by ethno-linguistic fractionalization, the likelihood that two randomly selected people in a country will be from different ethnic groups. The likelihood that rebels are victorious hinges on the governments capacity to defend itself, in other words, on the extent of their military expenditure that is determined by the size of its taxable base which is then, in turn, proxied again by per capita income and natural resource endowments, calculated by the share of primary exports in the GDP.²³ The outcomes of a successful rebellion will result in either a complete takeover of the state or secession from it (the desire to secede is proxied by population size). If the former takes place, then the expected benefits of rebellion lie in the capacity of the new rebel government to repay their supporters which is proxied yet again by the taxable capacity of the current regime in power. But if the latter situation transpires, then the taxable base of the pre-secession state is not the right basis for the future benefits of rebellion as distributional considerations become more crucial instead.²⁴

The results indicated that four factors were central in predicting the onset of civil war. Higher per capita income reduced the probability that this type of intrastate violence would occur as rebels would be disinclined to sacrifice larger wages to engage in combat against the state, especially since the duration of any conflict remains unknown. The presence of natural resources increased the likelihood of onset, but after a certain threshold, reduced the chances of it. Although, the authors claimed that the overall effect of having natural resources was more of a burden than a blessing, except in rare instances in which a country can avoid rebellion through monetary concessions only made possible by the exceedingly high amount of rents they receive from their abundant natural resources. The next finding was that countries with larger populations were more at risk for experiencing a civil war and this was attributed to greater desires for secession. While the authors did point out that this finding may be open to interpretation as population size was also used to proxy coordination costs, they simply stated that aspirations for

²³ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "On Economic Causes of Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 50 (1998): 566.

²⁴ Ibid, 563.

secession predominate. Finally, the effect of ethno-linguistic fractionalization was measured and the results were different from the initial prediction which assumed that higher levels would increase the prospects for civil war onset. Instead, this did not have any effect on the likelihood that this kind of domestic conflict would ensue as countries with almost complete homogeneous societies and ones with highly fractionalized populations showed no probable indication that this would increase or decrease their chances for experiencing a civil war. Rather, what was shown to increase a country's risk for incurring a civil war was not ethno-linguistic fractionalization per se, but the degree of that fractionalization which facilitates rebel coordination.²⁵

In order to test the explanatory power that greed-based theories hold in predicting the onset of civil war, researchers must first identify quantifiable variables for opportunity. Sometimes this task is relatively straightforward, for example, if one wanted to measure the levels of economic inequality that exist within a country, they could use the GINI coefficient of income which shows how income is distributed throughout a nation's population. But several variables cannot be measured this easily which forces researchers to use calculable proxies instead and this becomes very problematic down the line. First off, certain proxies that are intended to represent the opportunity for rebellion can just as easily be used as indicators of grievance. Greed-based theories state that rebel recruits must be compensated and this compensation has to be greater than their income foregone when they decided to quit their jobs and enlist as rebels. Therefore, rebellions are believed to occur when foregone income is remarkable low but this could also be interpreted as an objective economic grievance.²⁶ Secondly, most of what they are trying to measure is really not being measured at all by the specific proxy variables they chose and thus, it becomes very difficult to decipher what they are actually capturing instead. For instance, the presence of natural resources are thought to increase the chances that a country will experience a civil war as they provide potential rebels with the opportunity for extortion. In reality, this is not based on concrete, observable data regarding rebel

²⁵ Ibid, 569.

²⁶ Laurie Nathan, "The Frightful Inadequacy of Most of the Statistics: A Critique of Collier and Hoeffler on Causes of Civil War" (Discussion Paper no. 11, Crisis States Research Center, University of Cape Town, South Africa, 2005), 4.

behavior but simply inferred from a mere correlation between primary commodity exports to GDP and civil war onset.²⁷ The problem with greed-based theories is that they are essentially going around in circles as they are predicated around *assumptions* of rebels' behavior and motives which are then identified by structural indicators and quantifiable proxies that are statistically analyzed along with the occurrence of civil wars in which once again new *assumptions* are made about rebel's behavior and motives. This makes their variables of interest lack true explanatory power as they do not accurately identify any real causal mechanisms that can trigger the onset of civil war. Although, these theories are still useful in providing information about the structural characteristics of a country that can increase their chances of experiencing a civil war in the future, such as having a large population, low levels of per capita income or abundant natural resources, to name a few.

The literature needs an in-depth exploration into other causal relationships that exist between certain understudied variables and the probability of civil war onset which are not related to the structural characteristics of a country or citizen's grievances. Examining the roles of repression and signals from external actors will help fill this gap.

Repression Theories

Repression-based theories bring something new to the literature which has been predominately overwhelmed by structuralist accounts of civil war onset that center around the notion that these types of conflicts simply "break out".²⁸ Other researchers are starting to take a process-oriented approach towards the study of civil war onset which suggests that conflicts of this magnitude must build up over a period of time through an ever-changing interaction of violence between a state and its dissidents. The use of state repression is said to be the key in uncovering *when* this sort of intrastate conflict will occur based on micro-level units of observation between a regime and the oppositional forces against it which adds a temporal dynamic to the literature that was previously only

²⁷ Ibid, 2.

²⁸ Joseph K. Young. "Antecedents of Civil War Onset: Greed, Grievance and State Repression," in *What Do We Know About Civil War?*, edited by David Mason and Sara Mitchell (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, forthcoming), 2.

able to predict *where* conflict was likely to erupt.²⁹ Within studies of civil war, there are several competing theories all attempting to explain exactly how repression causes onset.

One particular study conducted by Nicolas Rost attempts to show how human rights violations can lead to onset of intrastate violence. He defines human rights violations in terms of infringements by the state on its citizens' personal integrity rights which are specifically listed as instances of torture, political imprisonment, "disappearances", and extrajudicial killings. These variables are tested in multivariate models to assess their influence on the likelihood of civil war onset.³⁰ But what he is particularly interested in is linking state weakness to a higher probability that a state will use violent repression tactics against its dissidents. Indiscriminate repression is said to cause civil war onset and be used more by weak states for several reasons. Since these countries have little resources, their police forces are highly inadequate and therefore they have trouble collecting intelligence to carry out targeted repression on those directly involved in rebelling against the state. Also, they may not have the economic resources to accommodate opposition's demands and since they do not want to appear even weaker than what they already are, they opt for indiscriminate repression.³¹ The general conclusion was that when state weakness and human rights violations are both present in a country the risk of civil war onset is extremely high. The idea is that when weak states use indiscriminate violence it leads to civil war because it drives civilians into the arms of rebel forces, giving them the strength they need to cause a noteworthy level of damage to the regime. But the author acknowledges that these types of repression tactics may simply be a strategy used by governments to respond to a rebel group, meaning that repression is merely a part of the escalatory process leading to civil war and not the sole cause for it.

This research was beneficial to the literature because it addressed the concept that certain aspects of repression such as the type being carried out may increase the likelihood of civil war onset, especially in weak states. The problem is that repression was treated as both the cause of civil war and as part of the process leading up to it.

²⁹ Ibid, 2.

³⁰ Nicolas Rost, "Human Rights Violations, Weak States, and Civil War," *Human Rights Review* 12, no. 196 (2011): 418.

³¹ Ibid, 422-423.

Further investigations are needed to address the endogeneity issues that arose when studying repression's impact on the risk of civil war onset that will be able to prove causation and not just correlation. It remains a difficult task to pinpoint the exact causal mechanism linking these two together, especially when dealing with large-N empirical models. Comparative case studies can offer a better insight into this relationship as they can meticulously trace the process of conflict escalation from minor struggles to all-out civil war.

Now although the previous study recognized that civil war was a process of interactions between the state and its dissidents in which indiscriminate repression led to onset, the decision for using this specific type of repression method was based on structural characteristics of a state. Weak states were supposedly more likely to use indiscriminate repression because they lacked the intelligence required to carry out targeted attacks and the resources needed to accommodate the opposition's demands.³² But research conducted by Joseph K. Young attempted to tackle the question as to why some weak states have never experienced a civil war while others have. He proposed a new conceptualization to measure state capacity which included the level of societal support in addition to the amount of resources a state has in determining whether or not repression will be used on dissidents and civilians. Both studies assume that repression causes civil war but the decision of leaders to use it are based on different factors. Also, the former study was more focused on the idea of state weakness and it did not include a comprehensive description of the process of violence that occurs between states and its dissidents. The model proposed by Young aimed to clarify this by emphasizing the micro-foundational motives of the state, civilians and dissidents which leads to civil war onset.³³

States, as rational actors, try to use the least costly actions to ensure they remain in power while still receiving support from the majority of the population. But when

³² Nicolas Rost, "Human Rights Violations, Weak States, and Civil War," *Human Rights Review* 12, no. 196 (2011): 422.

³³ Joseph K. Young, "Repression, Dissent, and the Onset of Civil War," *Political Research Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2013): 517.

leaders are concerned about their job security they will use repression to elicit greater compliance with their preferred policies and to quell any behavioral challenges to their authority.³⁴ In reality, this has a backlash effect as the more a state uses repression the less societal support it receives which in turn causes a rise in dissident activity. Dissidents can engage in a number of tactics to protest against the unjust policies of the state, such as demonstrations or any kind of violent disruptions that directly oppose the regime. The more dissident activity there is the more a state will up the level of brutal repression and this is how the process of violent interactions is established that will eventually lead to civil war onset. Therefore, this can explain the reason why some weak states never experience civil war because they have high levels of societal support which reduces the need for them to use repression to carry out their policies.³⁵

This research added to the literature a theory of how the process of interactions between a state and its dissidents could progress into violent confrontations. Although former studies linking repression to civil war onset all believed that civil wars occurred through a process of violence they did not directly identify how the course of this relationship changed overtime leading to civil war onset. By adding the concepts of societal support and a leader's job insecurity as the causal mechanisms that influence a leader's decision to use repression or not filled this gap. But it becomes problematic when trying to measure these concepts as they cannot precisely be quantified so proxy variables are needed instead. Societal support was measured according to the term relative political capacity which is supposed to capture a state's capabilities to collect resources and control society. But in certain highly repressive regimes, governments face no difficulties in collecting taxes, implementing their policies and maintaining order. To truly measure societal support, opinions of citizens are needed to accurately assess the level of support a regime has not through proxy variables. Job insecurity which attempts to depict the likelihood that a leader will remain in power is calculated based on the time former executives were in office and on the rate of economic growth. But these measures also cannot adequately be used as substitutes for a leader's feelings on whether or not

³⁴ Ibid, 519.

³⁵ Ibid, 524.

their position in office is in jeopardy. Lastly, to test these theories a quantitative analysis was applied in which the spatial domain was across 162 countries, making it extremely difficult to actually assess the process of violence that occurs between a state and its dissidents in such a large number of cases, especially using statistical analysis. It would be better to critically examine these theories using only a few countries in order to see if the level of societal support and job insecurity have explanatory power.

Prior studies have all agreed upon the notion that increased state repression leads dissidents to up their rebellious efforts thus causing civil war onset, except they all had their own mechanisms to determine whether or not a state would use violent force. But newer work claims that escalation has been indirectly measured and only considered in isolation from other accelerating processes that can also cause civil war onset. Also, these studies are trying to stress the importance of where protests occur as this can produce a different escalatory process and elicit varying responses from a regime. One study by David Armstrong II and Christian Davenport puts forth three hypotheses regarding escalation processes that can all lead to civil war onset and which have largely been ignored in previous work.

The first hypothesis is the one most cited in studies of repression's impact on civil war onset, the inflammation hypothesis, which claims that civil wars occur because state repression triggers dissidents to up their violent efforts. The incapacity hypothesis says that when a state cannot successfully apply repression, dissidents will mobilize at an increasing rate leading to civil war onset because the weakness of the regime presents them with the opportunity for rebellion. In this sense, the level of repression is believed to be the best way to measure this opportunity structure because of the direct effects it has on citizens and upcoming protest movements. Lastly, the ineffectiveness hypothesis states that civil wars occur when state repression has no deterring effect on dissidents as they perceive the state to be weak despite the fact that they are sustaining the costs of using brutal force, dissidents still continue to up their level of violent activity. In addition to this, the study proclaims that it is not just the kind of dissent that occurs, such as nonviolent or violent uprisings, but the locale of this activity as well. They distinguish this to mean areas where low-level conflict occurs in the pre-civil war period that takes

place in either rural areas or urban ones.³⁶ According to them, special attention needs to be paid to the various strategies adopted by dissidents because it has relevance for existing theory and can effect how states interact with them depending on their preferred tactics of rebellion. Dissidents in the rural country side are thought to use more guerilla warfare type strategies to topple the regime while those in urban areas are said to resort to anti-government protests instead.

To test these theories, they examined 149 countries over a span of around 24 years using statistical analysis to see if the three escalatory processes for onset could all be observed. They operationalized their variables for the concepts of inflammation, ineffectiveness and incapability. The level of repression was based on the political terror scale measures and thought to represent the inflammation hypothesis. The guerilla war variable simply stood for whether or not the presence of this type of activity was present in previous years and represented the concept of incapability. Lastly, the ineffectiveness hypothesis was operationalized as a variable for increased dissent proxied by rises in the level of anti-government demonstrations or riots. They then measured the levels of repression, dissent and guerrilla war in the previous four years in the countries that experienced a civil war. Although their efforts were amicable it is difficult to operationalize such concepts of inflammation, ineffectiveness and incapability. Simply because a government does not choose to use repression against protestors does not necessarily mean that they are incapable of doing so. Also, it does not directly measure the precise actions taken by dissidents and regimes that would show in greater depth how the process of escalation occurs. It assumed that those in the countryside were using guerilla warfare tactics while those in the city took to the streets in protest, but this is not always the case. Repression may not always be the best way to assess the political opportunity structure because certain regimes will choose to respond to protestors in a nonviolent fashion and accommodate the desires of the opposition. Lastly, there was no distinction made on whether or not the repression carried out by the state was on civilians or combatants, which is a crucial component to be aware of when studying the effects of

³⁶ David Armstrong II and Christian Davenport, "From Mountains to Movements: Dissent, Repression and Escalation to Civil War" (Paper presented at the International Studies Association Annual Conference in San Diego, CA, March, 2006).

repression on civil war onset.

Viewing civil war onset as a process of state and dissident interactions has led to two competing theories within studies assessing the role of repression and protest movements. One set of scholars treat state repression as an independent variable and examine its impact on rebellion and domestic conflicts. The other group considers repression as the dependent variable in which states will apply it once protests and uprisings start becoming more violent and widespread.³⁷ In reality, any observable outcomes of domestic conflict ranging from peaceful negotiations, to successful deterrence or increasing levels of violence are determined by the actions of the government. If a state chooses to repress an upcoming protest movement, it is based on their presumption that it is easier to suppress lower levels of conflict before they reach higher stages of violent activity.³⁸ The problem with this is that the use of state repression on protest movements have led to mixed results in the literature, as in certain instances it has proven to be an effective deterring mechanism while in other cases it has escalated violence to the level of civil war onset. The question then, needs to be reframed to not focus on whether or not repression has the capacity to quell oppositionists or radicalize them, as it has the capacity to do both, but rather under what conditions does it produce these different outcomes.³⁹ This is where it becomes critical to determine who the protestors are and what strategies they are employing to achieve their desired policy outcomes. If a government decides to resort to repression, it is important to be aware of the specific tactics they use against dissidents as this has a direct impact on either increasing or decreasing the escalation to civil war onset.

Protestors are ever-changing their strategies in response to the governments actions towards them. At first, repression of oppositionists may be effective but only up until a certain threshold in which higher and higher levels of repression will actually

³⁷ Sabine C. Carey, "The Dynamic Relationship between Protest and Repression," *Political Research Quarterly* 59, no.1 (2006): 3.

³⁸ Jan Henryk Pierskalla, "Protest, Deterrence, and Escalation: The Strategic Calculus of Government Repression," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54, no. 1 (2010): 121-125.

³⁹ Karl-Dieter Opp and Wolfgang Roehl, "Repression, Micromobilization, and Political Protest," *Social Forces* 69, no. 2 (1990): 523.

become counterproductive for the regime.⁴⁰ If nonviolent protestors are brutally targeted by their government then this will decrease the level of the groups nonviolent activity, while simultaneously increasing their level of violent activity. Research conducted by Karl-Dieter Opp and Wolfgang Roehl had similar findings to this concept as well. Once nonviolent demonstrators become casualties of a regime's brutal repressive forces it mobilizes the population to act on their behalf and increases the recruitment pool for rebels looking to gain more support.⁴¹ This decreases the cost of collective action as many citizens want justice for the atrocities that were committed against innocent activists who were legally exercising their right to protest. Therefore, when looking to determine when state repression has an escalatory effect on dissident activities, it is vital to address if the opposition is peacefully protesting or whether they are using violent means to achieve what they want. Another aspect that is also important to keep in mind when assessing the likelihood that repression will trigger civil war onset is to look at the type of repression being carried out, meaning whether it is selective or collective in nature.

Philip Hultquist published a study assessing the effectiveness of collective repression as a counterinsurgency technique. What was found is that when indiscriminate violence is carried out by a regime it increases the probability that an escalation to civil war onset will occur. When states use indiscriminate repression tactics against their own people, they do not bother to distinguish between those who were actively involved in either violent rebellion and those who were simply innocent bystanders, violent force is applied to everyone equally. Under these conditions, citizens view normal channels for political expression as closed and they come to the conclusion that even if they did not participate in these uprisings their safety is at risk which causes them to join the opposition.⁴² This is how repression can lead to civil war onset depending on the type and target these actions are carried out on. Since this research was conducted using a

⁴⁰ Mark Irving Lichbach, "Deterrence or Escalation? The Puzzle of Aggregate Studies of Repression and Dissent," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 31, no. 1 (1987): 270.

⁴¹ Karl-Dieter Opp and Wolfgang Roehl, "Repression, Micromobilization, and Political Protest," 525.

⁴² Philip Hultquist, "Is Collective Repression an Effective Counterinsurgency Technique? Unpacking the Cyclical Relationship Between Repression and Civil Conflict," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* (2015): 8.

cross-national study to determine repression's effect on conflict escalation it is only able to produce a generalizable finding. Also it looked at the impact indiscriminate repression had on an already armed insurgency so future studies should focus on the effects of this type of repression on unarmed protestors. Case studies and small-N research designs will have better accounts of how exactly this process works by looking at individual instances of repression instead of using statistical analysis over a large number of countries.

In the literature it is hard to come across research projects that utilize small-N designs to assess the role of repression on civil war onset, although luckily, few do exist. One study, which was only a part of Kirssa Cline Ryckman's dissertation, put forth an escalation process model to show how repression leads to the onset of civil war in which she used empirical data from the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings to test her hypotheses. The process leading up to a civil war requires five steps, first a protest movement must form, then it needs to gain significant strength, next it will switch its orders from calling on the government to modify specific policies to demanding regime change, then these dissidents will transform into a rebel group and finally the government must respond with violence in return.⁴³ In this sense, repression only works in the opposite favor of the regime as it mobilizes larger portions of the population to join rebel groups since they no longer feel as if they are safe. Therefore, the dependence on violent repression tactics only works to escalate the conflict to the level of civil war onset.

Figures from 17 countries in the Middle East and North Africa which were engaged in the Arab Spring uprisings were analyzed. The statistics on these occurrences were collected from major world publications from the Lexis-Nexis database and were then transformed into sequences of events that were compared against each other in order to form clusters that were similar in nature. These results were then evaluated against the escalation process model to see if they followed the five steps hypothesized to lead to civil war onset. If countries with similar events were clustered together and their protest movements advanced along the five phases, then the hypotheses were deemed as supported. To determine if a movement gained strength, regular weekly protests with over 10,000 participants had to be observed and conveyed in the articles that were

⁴³ Kirssa Cline Ryckman, "Repression and the Civil-War Life-Cycle: Explaining the Use and Effect of Repression Before, During, and After Civil War" (PhD. diss., University of Arizona, 2012), 102.

accessed. To assess when the uprisings switched their goals to demand regime change also had to be reflected in the reports that were utilized for this study. If a movement was powerful and calling for the country's top leaders to step down, then the government's strategy in responding to these proclamations was coded depending on whether or not they used repression or accommodation to quell these rising tensions. Lastly, in instances in which the regime responded violent force, it was necessary to determine if the protest movements metastasized into rebel forces which was verified by news articles where such organizations declared themselves as such. The sequence of events was based on three types of responses from the government which were either accommodation, repression or a mixture of the two. By organizing these in the order in which they occurred allowed for the specific responses to be greatly detailed regarding the number of times they were employed and how long they were carried out for. Once these events were clustered together, a symmetrical matrix was produced in which a cluster analysis could then be performed to group these sequences together based on their similarities.⁴⁴ The distance for what was to be considered to as "similar" was eased in order to allow for two or more sequences of events to be clustered together and this process was repeated until all sequences were linked.

The results showed that in three countries involved in the Arab Spring uprisings (Libya, Syria and Yemen) in which the governments resorted to harsh repression tactics, it escalated the conflicts towards civil war onset. The one case which did not fit this mold, was the uprising that took place in Bahrain. The reason cited for why this country did not become engaged in a civil war of their own was due to the fact that 1,500 troops from Saudi Arabia and the UAE came to their "rescue". According to this study they were responsible for clearing out all the protesters at Pearl Roundabout which essentially saved the Bahraini regime from succumbing to civil war. Because of this factor, Bahrain was put into its own cluster and did not follow down the path predicted by the escalation process model. According to hypothesis 4b, in certain rare circumstances where protest movements escalate to this phase in the model they experience some kind of irregularity

⁴⁴ Ibid, 112.

that allows repression to eventually work.⁴⁵ In this case, the troops from Saudi Arabia and the UAE are this irregularity. This is why although the Bahraini regime engaged in harsh repression against a strong movement, the rebel group did not form.

But this thesis seeks to downplay how the GCC intervention contributed to the reasons why an armed insurgency did not form in Bahrain by showing how the specific type of repression tactics carried out by the state's security forces combined with external factors played a bigger role behind why this kind of organization was never established.

Transnational Factors and Civil War

Traditionally, the literature on civil wars have tended to study this political phenomenon through a closed-polity approach which largely disregards external factors as having a causal effect on the probability that a country will descend into this type of intrastate conflict. Instead, transnational factors are thought to influence the duration and outcome of civil wars, but not the onset as this is attributed to specific economic and political factors occurring inside a state. External intervention in civil wars, for humanitarian and/or military purposes, have been studied to assess their impact on the duration of conflict while the role of external forces has also been analyzed to understand their role in civil war resolution, as certain scholars have predicted that the presence of a third party will increase the likelihood that a government and its opposition will come to negotiated settlements. But recent studies have started to examine the external factors which make the prospects for civil war *onset* more likely. One study conducted by Kristian Skrede Gleditsch found that the the likelihood of civil war onset is heavily influenced on whether or not surrounding countries are already engaged in civil wars of their own, taking notice of the spill-over effects of this type of violence.⁴⁶ Other transnational factors have also been cited as increasing the likelihood of civil war onset, such as the size of diasporas in neighboring countries which are thought to be more willing to economically support their ethnic kin in staging a successful insurgency against their government.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 134.

⁴⁶ Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, "Transnational Dimensions of Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research* 44, no. 3 (2007): 294.

Today, civil wars can be strongly influenced by transnational factors which have been largely understudied in the recent literature. Although research in this area is starting to thrive, very few of these studies have attempted to advance the current findings on the causes of civil war onset by aligning their work with international relations scholarship. By applying IR theories which explain how interstate wars occur to intrastate conflicts will offer a more comprehensive image of civil war onset by addressing the role external actors can play. Bargaining theories and rationalist explanations will provide the conceptual framework needed to make these connections. Therefore, a brief review of these two international relations theories will be presented alongside the literature which has already attempted to incorporate these perspectives into their studies on civil war onset. To assess the transnational features of civil war, signals made by external actors will be defined and explained in order to show how they can influence the likelihood that this type of intrastate violence will occur.

Bargaining Theories and Interstate War

When conflicts erupt between states it is usually attributed to differences regarding policy choices or the allocation of resources.⁴⁷ In order to try and mitigate the conflict from escalating to a full-blown war several attempts are made in which the countries engaged in these disagreements try to come to a negotiated settlement. Thus the bargaining process begins in which states will try and influence other's expectations about what they are willing to compromise on. In instances like these, features of cooperation and conflict can be seen as all actors have incentives to come to a mutual agreement versus the costs of going to war but they have contrasting ideas on the specific conditions of the agreement. Sometimes states will make a commitment to carry out a specific action in the future which is expected to make others succumb to terms of their liking. Promises to provide certain benefits to countries may be made if they agree to another's stipulations, but if states are still unwilling to budge than others may threaten to use force against them. In this case, all parties to the conflict must assess the credibility of these claims and decide whether or not they will change their position. War is averted

⁴⁷ Clayton Lynn Thyne, "Cheap Signals, Costly Consequences: How International Relations Affect Civil Conflict" (PhD. diss., University of Iowa, 2007), 23.

when states are confident that other states will carry out their threats so they decide to come to a final agreement that is tolerable to everyone, but when states are uncertain about the willingness and capabilities of other states to actually go forward with their threats they will resort to violent means to settle their disputes.⁴⁸ By going to war states are able to become aware of others capabilities and resolve which will then enable them to finally come to a mutually agreed upon settlement.

Rationalist Explanations and Interstate Wars

Going to war is costly for all parties involved which is why rational actors try to avoid it by all means necessary, but in certain instances wars end up taking place anyway. A common rationalist explanation for the occurrence of interstate wars is due to the anarchical nature of the international system in which no supranational governing authority exists to enforce the law and therefore nothing is in place to prevent a state from using force and going to war with another.⁴⁹ But the lack of a global “police force” does not explain why this prevents states from negotiating agreements in which both would prefer to the alternative of fighting. Also, under the conditions of anarchy states must rely on their own self-help to ensure their survival. A state may simply be trying to make itself more secure by increasing its military capabilities but this essentially makes other states less secure which can lead to a security dilemma and eventually war. Although if the first state did not anticipate this domino effect would occur resulting in a costly war, then the problem is one of miscalculation not anarchy in which bargaining could have been used to resolve it.⁵⁰ Other rationalist explanations focus on the logical reasons states would engage in preventive and preemptive wars. If a hegemonic power is loosing its influence and it believes that it will be attacked in the near future by a rising power than this is said to make a preventive war rational. The mere shift in the balance of power is used as the explanatory factor that causes states to go to war but this does not consider how both parties could construct an agreement that leaves both better. In the situation of a preemptive war, both states would prefer to live in harmony with one another but states

⁴⁸ Ibid, 23, 43.

⁴⁹ James D. Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995): 384.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 381.

can never be certain if another's commitment to this is credible. Therefore, a state may decide to attack another before it reneges on its promise of maintaining peace. A largely unexamined concept in rationalist explanations on the causes of interstate war is that of threat perceptions which has only recently taken the *intentions* of a state as a source of threat that is independent of military capabilities.⁵¹ When a state is uncertain about the willingness of another to carry out their threats it may increase the likelihood that they will go to war because they may not want to risk being unprepared against a possible imminent attack in the near future. Therefore, the lack of information regarding the true intentions and capabilities of another state can be the driving force leading to interstate wars.

Both Theories of Interstate War

A common thread intertwining these two theories together is the fact that in both instances, privately held information regarding one's capabilities and intentions creates the conditions for uncertainty which leads to the onset of war. From the rationalist perspective, if both parties in a conflict accurately represented this information then the prospective loser would decline to fight. While the bargaining theory predicts that if both states were truthful about their intentions towards one another then they would be able to reach a mutual agreement over the contested issue at hand. When states threaten others, whether they are serious or not, they want to convince everyone else that they intend to act in hopes of making others yield to the goals they are trying to achieve. But when other parties to the conflict are uncertain over the credibility of these threats and another state's actual capabilities wars are likely to ensue.

For this reason, it is plausible to conclude that if a country's foreign policy choices to go to war are receptive to and influenced by the perceptions they have regarding another state's intentions, then these overt threats from one state to another can convey information.⁵² There are two types of threats employed to influence states'

⁵¹ Janice Gross Stein, "Threat Perception in International Relations," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 2nd ed., edited by Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 366.

⁵² Robert F. Trager, "Diplomatic Calculus in Anarchy: How Communication Matters," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 2 (2010): 347.

perceptions of others, one being verbal warnings and the other actual physical threats. Normally, these spoken threats are simply designed to signal the capacity and intention of one state to inflict harm on another and usually take the form of “if-then” conditional statements. Whereas physical threats are non-verbal signals that intend to communicate the seriousness of one’s intent to punish undesirable behavior such as mobilizing troops or creating new alliances.⁵³

Interstate Signaling

When states attempt to inform another of their intentions using threats, this is referred to as a signaling game in international relations. One player, the sender, tries to convey information about the future moves they will make in response to the possible moves the receiving state may take.⁵⁴ One thing is certain regarding communication between states in the international system and that is the fact that several possible courses of action are available for the threatening state to make, but the problem is that the receiving state is unsure which they will choose. When disagreements arise, all states involved may hope for an agreement to be reached over the costs of going to war, but somewhere along the line there is a conflict of interest at some level over how this settlement is to be reached. These differences in interests allow scholars to explore instances of strategic information transmission, where the sender may attempt to bluff and exaggerate their willingness to carry out a threat to advance their interests at the expense of the receiver.⁵⁵ Knowing this is a possibility, the receiving state must decide whether or not to discredit the signals of the sender or to take them seriously.

Some signals are more credible than others because they can convey more concrete information to the receiving state about the actual capabilities and intentions of another state, whereas other signals are more ambiguous in nature. Cheap signals are equivalent to verbal threats and actors face no significant cost to make these types of claims. Most verbal communication between states, such as diplomatic statements, can be

⁵³ Janice Gross Stein, “Threat Perception in International Relations,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 370.

⁵⁴ James D. Morrow, *Order within Anarchy: The Laws of War as an International Institution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 50.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 51.

thought of as cheap signals that still have the potential to affect a state's perceptions of another's intentions to carry out a threat or not. Costly signals on the other hand are those threats which would be pricey for a state to break as these signals convey meaning that the sender is willing to incur some high cost to carry out their threats. Therefore, they are seen as more credible than cheap signals as they create less uncertainty about a state's true intentions which convinces the receiver of the credibility of the sender's threat.⁵⁶ Overall, states send signals as an attempt to convey a message about their intended actions in the future, but understanding these proclamations does not necessarily require believing them because honest actors along with deceivers can send the same messages. This is one of the main reasons why states who are the intended receiver of these signals pay critical attention to the reputation of the state sending these signals in order to decipher their credibility.⁵⁷ Now that these theories on the causes of interstate war have been thoroughly explained, they will be applied and related to intrastate conflict to show how they can also be utilized in the civil war literature as well.

International Relations Theories and Intrastate Conflict

With few exceptions, the civil war onset literature has exclusively examined factors within a state in order to explain how conflict arises between a government and an opposition group. This is extremely problematic as states do not simply exist in a vacuum and they can be influenced by outside forces. Applying the bargaining model and rationalist explanations for interstate wars to intrastate conflicts will show how external actors can effect the decision-making processes of a regime and its opposition to reach mutual negotiations or opt for continued violence based on the types of signals they send and how they are perceived.

In all states, a certain level of opposition to the government exists at all times but particular circumstances make it highly unlikely that these groups will try to overthrow the regime for several reasons. Sometimes people's current situations are not deemed bad enough to risk their lives by joining a rebellion, in other cases a government may be so

⁵⁶ Ibid, 50-51.

⁵⁷ Robert Jervis, "Signaling and Perception: Drawing Inferences and Projecting Images," in *Political Psychology*, edited by Kristen Renwick Monroe (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2002), 304.

repressive that opposition groups have little or no chance of openly congregating without facing grave consequences or simply because dissidents are able to come to a mutually agreed upon contract with the state in order to avoid the costs of fighting. Just as in interstate wars, some level of uncertainty must be present for civil wars to occur as well. If a government and its opposition were completely aware of the information regarding each other's capabilities, resolve and terms of agreement they would be willing to compromise on, then they would be able to peacefully settle their problems without resorting to combat. As war is costly for both parties, the regime and its dissidents will opt for negotiations that may be less than the ideal standards they were envisioning. But uncertainty regarding states intentions can effect the probability that interstate and intrastate wars may occur. A key to understanding how external actors can influence the onset of this kind of domestic conflict is based on the type of signals they send which are determined by the actions of a regime or its opposition.

Bargaining and rationalist explanations in international relations theories have provided significant influence for explaining how interstate wars can occur but few have attempted to extend this same logic to the study of civil war onset. There are several characteristics of interstate wars that are prevalent in civil wars as well and sometimes these features may even be more extreme in these circumstances. Both IR theories proclaim that conflicts arise over a disagreement regarding either the allocation of resources or policy choices which hold true in intrastate conflicts as well. A government and its opposition both have incentives to misrepresent information regarding their abilities to carry out their threats against one another in pursuit of their demands.⁵⁸ Information problems leading to the uncertainty of others' intentions and capabilities are actually more severe in intrastate conflicts. For starters, data about the size of potential rebel forces, their financial income and the level of support they have among their fellow citizens are usually hard for a government to obtain. Also, rebel groups may sometimes be unaware of their own strength while in other cases they may have a comprehensive understanding of their overall capabilities but they may have strong incentives to keep this knowledge a secret from the government because the security forces of the state

⁵⁸ Barbara F. Walter, "Bargaining Failures and Civil War," *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (2009): 245.

would attempt to eradicate their sphere of influence. Ideally, governments would only like to grant concessions to dissident groups in which they believe have a strong support base and are well funded, but they have significant trouble determining weak rebel forces from strong ones unless they engage them in battle first. This is how the uncertainty of threats from rebel forces can cause a state to opt for continued violence instead of reaching a negotiated settlement. Another uncertainty issue arises when governments have an incentive to withhold information about their willingness to engage in battle or grant concessions because they may want to appear tough in the face of numerous potential challengers.⁵⁹ Some governments may be secretly uncommitted to actually going to war with an opposition group and may be eager to grant concessions but they want to remain tough in the eyes of the population. In this case, uncertainty problems arise just as in interstate wars, regarding the true intentions of rebels' and governments' capabilities and their willingness to carry out their threats.

Also, before civil wars break out, large power asymmetries always exist between potential rebel groups and the government which makes it more likely and harder to ascertain if the state will renege on its promises. In attempts to avoid conflict, they may offer to restructure the political process, share power or transfer autonomy but weak rebel groups have little capabilities to penalize a government should it fail to follow through with these agreements. While states in the international system still face the same commitment problems, they have a variety of economic, military and political means to keep each other from breaking their promises.⁶⁰ As long as rebel groups have little ability to enforce the terms of an agreement, they may rather risk going to war than risk the potential that a state will not fulfill its commitments. While states in the international system still face the same commitment problems, they have a variety of economic, military and political means to keep each other from breaking their promises.⁶¹ As long as rebel groups have little ability to enforce the terms of an agreement, they may decide to continue engaging in violent conflict with the state than risk the potential that a

⁵⁹ Ibid, 248-250.

⁶⁰ Robert F. Trager, "Diplomatic Calculus in Anarchy: How Communication Matters," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 2 (2010): 348.

⁶¹ Robert F. Trager, "Diplomatic Calculus in Anarchy: How Communication Matters," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 2 (2010): 348.

government would renege on its promises. Although dissidents may not wish to engage in battle they are faced with the difficult task of negotiating with the regime in a condition where they have few mechanisms to monitor and check the behavior of the central government.

Signals from External Actors and the Onset of Civil War

One way which can help increase or decrease the levels of uncertainty between a state and its opposition is through signals from external actors. Just as states in the international system signal to each other about the future actions they are willing to take if one state decides to behave in a certain manner, they also do this in cases of intrastate conflict as well. Several studies have been conducted to uncover the different types of signals and the impact they have on the actions of others. Although most of the research has centered around cases of interstate disputes, the findings can also be applied to instances of domestic strife between a regime and its opposition where the signals from external actors affect the probability that both sides will either reach a negotiated settlement or opt for continued violence instead.

According to work conducted by Robert Jervis and James D. Fearon, states which are the intended target of the signals should only focus on those which are deemed as “costly”. This is because costly signals decrease the level of uncertainty between states as the intended actions of the threatening state are readily observable and pricey for them to follow through on. The assumption is then that these types of signals cannot be readily faked and would have dire consequences should a state not take them.⁶² There are two types of costly signals that can be sent and each are thought to actively convince others of their intentions. The first type of costly signals are ones that “sink costs”, meaning that they are financially expensive for a state to endure and can be readily observed, examples of this include mobilizing troops or economic sanctions.⁶³ The second type of costly signals are ones which are harmful for the state to break because they are sensitive to the reactions of their domestic audience which would view their inability to carry out these

⁶² Robert Jervis, “Signaling and Perception: Drawing Inferences and Projecting Images,” in *Political Psychology*, edited by Kristen Renwick Monroe (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2002), 301.

⁶³ James D. Fearon, “Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (1997): 70.

actions as a failure in the state's foreign policy. These can be thought of as promises to establish new trade ties or military alliances in which the sending state's reputation is on the line internationally and domestically.⁶⁴ When states experience severe domestic conflict, external actors are always prone to comment on these situations out of fear they may transform into a bigger problem. They attempt to signal to all parties involved in the dispute what are the appropriate actions that should be taken and signal which side they would be willing to support should more violence erupt. Normally, states offer support to the government in power, as most rebel forces are not seen as a viable option for the future of a country. Therefore, states will send costly signals in support of a regime by promising new trade ties or military alliances which are aimed at forcing an opposition party to back down. In atypical situations external actors may send hostile signals to a government in which they threaten to mobilize troops and enforce economic sanctions if the government does not change its actions towards dissidents. In both cases, costly signals from external actors should increase the willingness of both parties to come to a mutually agreed upon settlement to end the violence because the threats being sent decrease the uncertainty that one side of the conflict will receive foreign support if a civil war were to break out. Therefore, costly signals affect the likelihood that a state and its opposition will more than likely reach mutual negotiations with one another, but cheap signals do not have this ability.

Cheap signals are considered as less credible than costly ones because they are simple statements of intent that do not involve taking any costly action. A study by Robert F. Trager claims that although cheap signals make a state's willingness to carry out their threats harder to predict they can still affect the perceptions of intentions. Usually in interstate disputes, cheap signals are sent via diplomatic statements which attempt to convey information about the threat each poses to one another.⁶⁵ Another comprehensive study, a dissertation by Clayton Lynn Thyne, relates signals from external actors to the cause of civil war onset, depending on the type of signal sent. Just as costly signals have two distinct types, so do cheap signals. Cheap signals that are supportive of

⁶⁴ Ibid, 70.

⁶⁵ Robert F. Trager, "Diplomatic Calculus in Anarchy: How Communication Matters," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 2 (2010): 362.

a government are public statements from prominent political figures giving their support and offers for aid may be made as well. In the case of cheap signals that are hostile towards a government, public statements condemn the actions of a regime and threaten to use sanctions if they do not change their ways.⁶⁶ Thyne tested these hypotheses through a large-N analysis of all states from 1949 to 1999 to see the effects that external actors had on the onset of civil war. In addition he also tested these hypotheses through a case study that examined how the cheap signals the United States sent affected the onset of the FLSN's rebellion in Nicaragua in 1978.⁶⁷ In both instances, he finds support for the hypothesis that cheap signals from external actors can cause civil war onset.

But in this thesis, signals from external actors are treated as an intermediate variable because the statements from prominent foreign powers are based on the actions of a regime and its opposition which determine whether or not they will be sent in support or against either side and whether or not they will be costly or cheap. The most important kind of signals to pay attention to are cheap ones because they introduce uncertainty into the bargaining process between a government and its opposition. When cheap signals condemning the repression tactics of a regime are made it causes dissidents to overestimate their fighting capabilities based on their future expectations that foreign allies would intervene on their behalf if a civil war did ensue while simultaneously causing them to increase their demands on the government, thus making it highly unlikely that mutual negotiations would be reached to end the rising hostilities.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this thesis, the repression tactics that will be under investigation are those which are carried out by the state. Repression will be defined as coercive measures government authorities take to hinder domestic opposition and maintain their stronghold on power.⁶⁸ A plethora of studies have treated state repression as a single entity that those in office use to deter dissidents from generating too much support for fear that their

⁶⁶ Clayton Lynn Thyne, "Cheap Signals, Costly Consequences: How International Relations Affect Civil Conflict" (PhD. diss., University of Iowa, 2007), 36.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 17.

⁶⁸ Emily Hencken Ritter, "Policy Disputes, Political Survival, and the Onset and Severity of State Repression," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58, no. 1 (2014): 145.

political authority may be in jeopardy. They neglect to realize that there are varying degrees of repression tactics that can be utilized by regimes and some are more successful at subduing protest movements while others only escalate the level of violence. Therefore, two elements, target and type, will be taken into account in order to pinpoint where the specific kind of repression methods used by both regimes vary. The target aspect denotes whom the aggression is carried out on, meaning whether or not the repression is selective or indiscriminate in nature. The latter category refers to when the state neglects to make a distinction between those who were actively protesting and those who were not, as violent force is equally inflicted on everyone in the surrounding vicinity. Whereas selective repression, on the other hand, is only directed at people who were participating in these movements. The type of repression simply means whether or not the tactics being carried out were in a violent or nonviolent fashion which can be conceptualized as restrictive laws versus the use of force. Nonviolent strategies are usually in the form of legislation preventing certain groups from publicly gathering or legally organizing while violent measures involve the physical harm of dissidents that can range from firing teargas into highly populated demonstrations, shooting regime opponents or systematic torture.

The signals from external actors in this thesis will be classified into two categories, either “costly” or “cheap” statements that are in support of a regime or its opposition. Costly signals are those which are pricey for the signaling party to incur but they are deemed as more credible because of this.⁶⁹ Costly signals in support of a regime are announcements to establish new military alliances or trade ties, while those that are against a regime will be in the form of economic sanctions or the mobilization of troops. Cheap signals cost relatively little for external actors to make which is why they are viewed as less reliable than their counterpart as they do not provide concrete information regarding whether or not the sending party will act if the level of violence in a country continues to rise.⁷⁰ Cheap signals that are pro-government are vague statements of

⁶⁹James D. Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (1997): 69.

⁷⁰Robert Jervis, "Signaling and Perception: Drawing Inferences and Projecting Images," in *Political Psychology*, ed. Kristen Renwick Monroe (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2002), 301.

support or offers for aid while anti-government signals are public declarations of condemnation or the withdrawal of foreign aid to a country.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Restatement of the Research Question and Aim of the Research

This thesis aspires to uncover the specific causal mechanisms that are responsible for the drastically different outcomes of the Arab Spring uprisings that took place in Bahrain and Syria. At first glance, these two countries may seem to have relatively little in common with one another, but after taking a more in-depth look at the two, it is revealed that they have unique, shared country-specific characteristics that distinguish them from the rest of the countries engulfed by the Arab Spring. In addition to this, both regimes responded in a nearly identical fashion to the emerging protest movements which made it seem probable at first that the aftermath of both uprisings would at least follow a similar path. As this has clearly not been the case, this study intends to examine the underlying factors that shaped whether or not the protest movements would result in the onset of civil war or not. By investigating the understudied independent variable of repression, this thesis aims to show how a variance in the different type and target of repression led to the absence of civil war in Bahrain while resulting in the onset of it in Syria. In addition, it aims to show how the specific kind of repression tactics being used caused a variance in the signals being sent from external actors which also influenced the direction of the protest movements into or away from civil war onset.

Why Bahrain and Syria?

The Arab Spring uprisings that occurred in Bahrain and Syria during the beginning months of 2011 were chosen as the cases best suited for the purpose of this analysis because they explicitly allow for the roles of repression and signals to be isolated in order to determine if they have the ability to cause the onset of civil war or not.

The Shared Country-Specific Characteristics of Bahrain and Syria

The unique features of Bahrain and Syria distinguish them from the rest of the countries that were embroiled in Arab Spring uprisings of their own and essentially caused them to respond in a similar manner to the initially nonviolent protest movements that arose. An overview of their shared qualities will be presented to emphasize how they effected their reactions and thus made it seem highly probable that the aftermath of their

uprisings would result in similar circumstances.

For starters, both countries have highly heterogeneous populations that are split along ethnic and religious lines. In Bahrain, Sunni Muslims are actually considered to be the minority, but there are distinct cliques within this category, furthering the already fragmented archipelago. There are the Sunni Muslim tribes that are aligned with the ruling al-Khalifa family, the Nejdi non-tribal Arabs from Saudi Arabia and the Hawala, Arab settlers from neighboring Iran.⁷¹ While the majority of the population is comprised of the Baharnah, Arab Shiites who view themselves as the autochthonous inhabitants of the small island nation, in addition to a few Persian immigrants who only account for a small fraction of the Shiite community.⁷² In Syria, Sunni Muslim Arabs constitute the biggest ethno-religious group followed by the Kurds who are non-Arab Sunnis, as well as smaller factions of Alawites, Christians and Druze.⁷³

On top of this, both regimes in power come from a minority group within the state, which is in stark contrast to all the other Arab Spring countries where the government and the security apparatuses are representative of the dominant majority group in the population in terms of ethnic and religious composition. In Bahrain, the reigning al-Khalifa family are Sunni Muslims who reside over a citizenry where 70% are Shia Muslims⁷⁴ while in Syria, the ruling al-Assad clan are Alawites, an offshoot sect of Shiism, who are in command of a society made up of around 74% Sunni Muslims and 10% Christians.⁷⁵

How these shared features effected their similar responses to the Arab Spring

⁷¹ Nelida Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama Since 1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 55.

⁷² Ibid, 55-56.

⁷³ Șerban Filip Cioculescu, "Civil War and Proxy War in Syria: The Ugly Face of the Arab Spring," in *Democracy and Security in the 21st Century: Perspectives on a Changing World*, ed. Valentin Naumescu (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 442.

⁷⁴ Zoltan Barany, "The "Arab Spring" in the Kingdoms" (Research paper, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Qatar, 2012), 18, 19.

⁷⁵ Prados, Alfred B. and Jeremy M. Sharp, *Syria: Political Conditions and Relations with the United States After the Iraq War* (CRS Report for Congress. Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2005), 8.

protests

In countries where a minority group is presiding over a clearly defined dominant majority, this effects how those in power decide to handle their daily responsibilities and strongly influences their decision making processes as they are more often than not viewed as illegitimate leaders in the eyes of the population. As a result, these types of regimes and their ruling elite must assemble the state in such a way that it will ensure the persistence of their authority. To maintain their stronghold on power, they must resort to micromanaging all aspects of society to repress even the slightest signs of any opposition groups forming as they could not compete against other forces or civil organizations promising change in the social, political or economic realms as they belong to groups which are demographically inferior to the rest of the population.⁷⁶ Therefore, the best way to guarantee their persistence overtime is to stack the army, police and secret service with members of their overrepresented minority to safeguard themselves against defectors and warrant regime loyalty. This simultaneously provides the government with the military might needed to oversee all other political institutions, giving them unrestrained capabilities to repress their opposition with an iron fist.

By taking a closer look at the intricacies that comprise the Bahraini and Syrian regimes, it is clear to see that they both employed all of these tactics with the hopes of continuing their rule despite the presence of a prevailing majority group. In both countries, the armed forces were ethnically stacked with members from their own distinct minority groups and critical key positions of authority were distributed among their co-sectarians in attempts to further strengthen their allies and ensure allegiance to the regime. As a final precautionary measure, both countries established their own informal security forces that were tasked to quietly coexist alongside the the military to weed out any individuals that were critical of the government and thus deemed to be a potential defector in the near future. In Bahrain, the military was lined with Sunnis, but the regime also permitted Muslims from this same sect in foreign countries to join their troops who were then granted citizenship in return for their services in attempts to generate a more

⁷⁶ Øystein Böhler, "Ethnic Minority Rule and Prospects for Violent Conflicts" (Master's Thesis, University of Bergen, 2013), 23-25.

equal ration of Sunnis to Shiites.⁷⁷ While in Syria, the Alawites held the greatest number of prominent political positions, controlled the top military units within the army and almost entirely dominated the Republican Guard, an elite division tasked with protecting the capital of Damascus from any potential coups as this city was formerly a prime target of such attempts.⁷⁸ Finally, both regimes constructed unofficial, “off the books” types of security forces that carried out the regimes’ most immoral undertakings and were known as the *shabiha*, or ghosts, in Syria and the *baltagiya*, which is similar to thugs, in Bahrain.⁷⁹

Consequently, once the Arab Spring uprisings within their own borders started gaining a noteworthy amount of momentum in the early months of 2011, it spurred the minority group leaders of the Bahraini and Syrian regimes into action which caused them to both respond to the initially nonviolent protesters with severe repression in order to put an immediate end to this type of civil disobedience. Their shared strategy of utilizing preventive repression tactics to contain potential revolutionary forces stems from the fact that their authority is in constant jeopardy as they only embody a small fraction of the population as a whole and therefore must instantly eliminate any threat to their rule. This is why the mass protests that took place in both countries were quickly met by government forces which brutally attacked peaceful protesters and only continued to intensify the severity of violent acts being inflicted on regime dissidents.

Both regimes attempted to justify their brutal reactions towards protesters by suggesting that the uprisings taking place were instigated by external forces that were plotting the overall demise of each nation. This was somehow supposed to validate their extreme uses of force as it was for the “greater good” of protecting and ensuring their country’s survival. In Bahrain, the chosen “enemy” was Iran who was accused of fostering a Shia conspiracy against the government while in Syria, the al-Assad regime listed a slew of perpetrators as the real antagonists of the uprisings, including Israel, the

⁷⁷ Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud and Andrew Reynolds, *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 90.

⁷⁸ Oded Haklai, "A Minority Rule Over a Hostile Majority: The Case of Syria," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 6, no. 3 (2000): 30

⁷⁹ James L. Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know* (2015): 123.

United States, Saudi Arabia and even the Palestinians. This also allowed both regimes to pit different religious sects against one another, even though the original protests were peaceful, cross-sectarian in nature and called for greater social, economic and political rights such as constitutional reforms, freer elections and an end to their state's human rights abuses. By invoking this discourse, both regimes were able to turn this particular frame into a self-fulfilling prophecy by playing on the fears of their religious minorities through insinuations that their rights and potential lives could be at stake if the majority rose to power. In Bahrain, this rhetoric was able to rally the Sunni minority against the Shiites, even the ones who had legitimate grievances with the state and similarly wanted political reforms as well, it still caused them to eventually back the regime and further enflame the sectarian animosities against the Shiite majority. While in Syria, the regime framed any challenge to their authority as a danger to all religious minorities, not just the Alawites.

A final but nonetheless important commonality that exists between the two uprisings surprisingly has nothing to do with the similar responses each regime took against protesters but rather how the international community reacted to the situations in both countries which bore a striking resemblance. In the beginning stages of the uprisings, initial statements or signals from prominent external actors condemning the actions of the Bahraini and Syrian regimes were almost nonexistent, despite their grotesque use of force against their own citizens. The responses from high ranking political figures in the United States will be used for the purpose of providing two examples of this type of behavior. Former U.S. Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, flew to Bahrain only four weeks after the uprisings started and upon his arrival home he said to the public, "Obviously, leading reform and being responsive is the way we'd like to see this move forward", but he failed to denounce the overt repression methods of the regime.⁸⁰ In Syria, the protests started in mid-March, but it was not until the end of July that then Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, altered the phrase, "Bashar al-Assad is losing legitimacy", to that of, "Bashar al-Assad has lost his legitimacy."⁸¹ These two examples

⁸⁰ Brownlee, Masoud and Reynolds, *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform*, 87-89.

⁸¹ James L. Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 115.

represent only a microcosm of the signals that were sent by external actors during the beginning phases of both uprisings which neglected to acknowledge and comment on the atrocities being committed against peaceful protesters.

Hypotheses and how the theoretical framework of escalation and signaling theories are relevant to my research

The first hypothesis postulates that the type and target of repression carried out by the Bahraini and Syrian regimes throughout the duration of the protests can account for the different outcomes seen in each country today. The second hypothesis posits that the specific type and target of repression caused a variation in the signals from external actors, essentially determining if they were made in support of the regime or its opposition which influenced both parties' decision making processes in deciding to come to mutual agreements or opt for incurring the costs of going to war with one another. The dependent variable can be conceptualized in terms of the absence of civil war onset (Bahrain) or the acceleration to the onset of civil war (Syria). This thesis hopes to add to the civil war onset literature by contributing to a better understanding of how certain types (nonviolent/violent) and targets (selective/indiscriminate) of state repression combined with signals from external actors can lead to this type of intrastate conflict.

The type and target of repression carried out by the Bahraini and Syrian regimes throughout the duration of the protests can account for the different outcomes seen in each country today. Although both the Bahraini and Syrian security forces responded to the initially nonviolent protestors with harsh brutality, the main difference lies within the target of their repression. In Bahrain, the repression methods carried out by the state were more selective in nature compared to the Syrian response, as most of the violence was directed specifically at protesters in the city's main square, Pearl Roundabout. While in Syria the regime's first reaction to the uprisings was to rely almost absolutely on indiscriminate repression, which fails to distinguish between those who were actively involved in protesting and those who were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. In addition to this, more nonviolent types of repression tactics were taken by the Bahraini regime through the adoption of various laws aimed at hindering the oppositional force's ability to legally organize and garner more support from the public. In Syria, the type of repression methods were mostly violent in nature, as the regime was more focused on

using tanks and heavy weaponry against mostly unarmed civilians, butchering large amounts of people as the protests went on.

The type of signals sent by external actors towards each regime and their opposition eventually changed overtime based on the divergent repression tactics being carried out by each regime which contributed to the different outcomes seen in each country today. This study will aim to show how cheap anti-government signals that involve avowals of condemnation and threats of economic sanctions towards the regime can influence the likelihood that a state and its opposition will not reach a mutual negotiation to settle their differences and continue to engage in violent conflict with one another. In Bahrain, the few signals or statements made by external actors were regularly in favor of the regime as offers of support were constantly being reiterated while in Syria, the signals that were made were staunchly against the actions of the government and support was instead shifted in favor of the oppositional forces as they publicly condemned the use of harsh repression being carried out by the security forces against unarmed civilians.

Research Design

In order to address the reason why civil war broke out in Syria but not Bahrain, a qualitative, comparative case study will be used to test for causation regarding the independent variable, repression, and the intermediate variable of signals, to see if they had a deterring or escalatory effect on the protest movements that took place in these countries during the timeframe from January 2011 until January 2012. Since the research question of this thesis is in nature, an explanatory inquiry, the central aim of this study is to systematically examine covariation between the variables of interest among these two cases for the purpose of causal analysis and to rule out rival explanations to come to a final conclusion.⁸² The comparative case study methodology was chosen as the best suited strategy for carrying out this task over other approaches such as the experimental and statistical methods for several reasons. Overall, the best procedure for obtaining valid, objective scientific explanations is through the experimental method because it can

⁸² David Collier, "The Comparative Method," in *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II*, ed. Ada W. Finifter (Washington, D.C.: The American Political Science Association, 1993), 108.

situationally manipulate the empirical data to be observed. But this approach is rarely used in the field of political science due to practical constraints and more importantly, ethical impediments.⁸³ On the other hand, the statistical method involves the mathematical maneuvering of observable data conducive to uncovering controlled relationships among variables. Although it can only control for key variables suspected to exert influence and not for all the others, it attempts to handle this situation by means of partial correlations instead. This approach is most favorable for scholars conducting large-N studies, but for academics analyzing only a few number of cases the comparative methodology is more feasible to use as the small quantity of relative situations do not allow for this kind of systematic control by way of partial correlations.⁸⁴ After taking all these factors into consideration, this is why the comparative case study method was adopted for the purpose of this study to allow for a more comprehensive analysis on how the roles of repression and signals from external actors can effect the likelihood of civil war onset.

As Bahrain and Syria are the only subjects of interest in this project, it was more beneficial to use a qualitative research design over a quantitative one as the small number of cases allows for the opportunity to provide a complete, in-depth account of the specific phenomenon under study which strengthens the internal and measurement validity of causal inferences made. Although, a commonly cited weakness of qualitative, comparative case studies is that they lack external validity, meaning that the results obtained cannot be generalized for different situations or ones involving larger populations. This is why a thick description of the cases will be presented as a means to solving this applicability problem. It is important to briefly reinforce the justification for small-N studies and therefore, worth mentioning a few issues illuminating these problems of validity. Researchers carrying out large-N studies can fall victim to “conceptual stretching”, where an idea so general is applied to a wide range of situations and when newer cases are added, the specific meaning of the concept at hand may not directly apply to them. Also, by doing this it fails to highlight the differences and similarities that

⁸³ Arend Lijphart, “Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method,” *The American Political Science Review* 65, no. 3 (1971): 684.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 684.

exist between cases which is the fundamental ingredient for meaningful comparative analysis.⁸⁵

A bigger constraint that this methodology must address is what several refer to as the “many variables small N” problem, but if properly utilized it can still compete with alternative explanations. In order to do this, the most similar systems design will be used to match Bahrain and Syria on all the important country-specific characteristics that they share which are not relevant to this study, in effect controlling for them and thus reducing the many variables issue. Although, it is nearly impossible to systematically match cases on all relevant control variables, a looser application of the most similar systems was applied. As the number of variables cannot be reduced by using comparable cases in which many variables are constant, except with regard to the phenomenon under investigation, it permits for the formation of relationships among a few key variables while keeping constant as many extraneous variables as possible.⁸⁶ As this thesis is interested in establishing whether or not there is causal relation between the independent variable, repression, as well as the intermediate variable, signals from external actors, and the dependent variables which can be conceptualized as the presence of civil war onset or the absence of it, the most similar systems design is the most suitable technique for achieving this goal.

⁸⁵ David Collier, “The Comparative Method,” in *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II*, 110.

⁸⁶ Carsten Anckar, “On the Applicability of the Most Similar Systems Design and the Most Different Systems Design in Comparative Research,” *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 11, no. 5 (2008): 389.

CHAPTER 4: BAHRAIN

On February 14, 2001, Bahrainis went out to cast their vote on the newly-proposed principles outlined in the National Action Charter, put forth by King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, in his attempts to end the ongoing unrest of the 1990s, return the country to constitutional rule and liberalize the state. Therefore, it was no surprise that the national referendum ratified the charter with an overwhelmingly high level of approval, as 90% of the population participated in the election and out of this, 98.4% voted in favor of it.⁸⁷ At first, the reforms seemed promising as they established an 80-member bicameral parliament, the National Assembly, that consisted of a 40-member, government-appointed upper house, the Shura Council, and a 40-member, popularly-elected lower house, the Council of Representatives, in addition to granting universal suffrage to women which made Bahrain the first Gulf Cooperation Council member-state to do so.⁸⁸ But little did the ruling al-Khalifa family know that a decade later, on the 10th anniversary of the National Action Charter, that protests would rock this tiny island nation to its core.

Background History

The date that most in the Western world associate with love and compassion, February 14, 2011 had a completely different meaning in Bahrain as citizens declared it to be a “Day of Rage” which signified to the world that the Arab Spring uprisings had finally reached the shores of the Persian Gulf. The initial demands of the protesters were numerous but they generally centered around finally implementing the long-overdue reforms promised to them in the National Action Charter that never materialized, as many felt that the constitutional amendments failed to adequately address people’s main complaint of not having equitable political representation.⁸⁹ Although members of the

⁸⁷Steven Wright and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, “Political Change in the Arab Oil Monarchies: From Liberalization to Enfranchisement,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 83, no. 5 (2007): 919.

⁸⁸Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin, eds., *Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance* (New York: Freedom House / Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 64.

⁸⁹Kenneth Katzman, *Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S* (CRS Report for Congress. Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2011), 2.

Council of Representatives were elected based on popular vote, the trivial abilities granted to them rendered this lower house of parliament a largely ineffective government body that was seemingly created for more symbolic purposes to appease societal demands at the time. This is why critics on the regime to grant the Council more genuine powers, to stop ethnically gerrymandering electoral districts and to provide better job opportunities for all Bahrainis. During the first stage of the protest movements, relatively few people demanded that the royal family step down as they preferred meaningful reform over revolution.

But fast-forward a couple months ahead to April and only remnants of the once-promising demonstrations could be seen as they had been almost entirely obliterated by the regime. The Bahraini uprising resulted in one of the only clear-cut victories for repression throughout the course of the Arab Spring.⁹⁰ What was it about the kind of repression tactics that the Bahraini security forces used which enabled them to quell rising tensions and deter citizens away from continuing to actively protest? Various scholars have attributed the intervention of the Gulf Cooperation Council's Jazeera Shield Forces to their overall success. The GCC, acting in accordance with one of their core principles, indivisible security, determined that it was their collective responsibility to uphold, protect and ensure the safety of the Bahraini regime which prompted them to take action.⁹¹ Many have been too quick in accrediting Bahrain's triumphant victory over the demonstrations to the intervention by the GCC-JSF because it is the easiest, most straightforward explanation.

In general, most people are not familiar with this tiny archipelago comprised of 33 islands, equaling 290 square miles combined, or for comparison purposes less than the size of New York City as a whole, in addition to housing a population of only 1.3 million in which 50% of the inhabitants are immigrants.⁹² Bahrain may be the smallest Middle Eastern country, but its size belies its critical importance to the American government, as

⁹⁰Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2013), 151.

⁹¹Karl P. Mueller, *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2015), 344.

⁹² "Bahrain," *CIA World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ba.html>.

the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet is stationed there, making this country a very vital ally. This is also why most Western critics remained silent in commenting on the events taking place in Bahrain and were negligent in denouncing the regime's violent use of force against peaceful protesters. On top of all that, Bahrain normally receives relatively little news coverage so it came as no shock that once the demonstrations began only a select number of Arab television stations decided to closely monitor the situation and international media outlets paid even less attention to the uprising.

All of these factors put together have resulted in the common trend of claiming that the external support Bahrain received prevented the country from descending into civil war onset, however, those asserting this statement as truth have not bothered to take a closer look into the finer details of the uprising. Although the constant reiteration that the al-Khalifa regime was only able to conquer the uprising due to the GCC forces gives this claim some verisimilitude, in reality, it represents a gross miscalculation of accountability as it was the Bahraini regimes own security forces who violently repressed their own people which resulted in the termination of the protest movements. The GCC intervention was not responsible for rescuing Bahrain from internal breakdown, at best, the crackdown on protesters might have taken a bit longer to accomplish without GCC assistance, but nevertheless the regime still would have triumphed.⁹³

The Bahraini uprising that took place during February and March of 2011 deserved more attention than it received, especially since it showed the international community that the oil-rich monarchies of the Gulf were not immune to popular revolt and also due to the fact that it was the largest of the Arab Spring uprisings, in terms of the percentage of the total population that actively took to the streets in protest.⁹⁴ But most importantly because the outcome of the uprising represented one of the only instances in which state repression succeeded in ending the unrest as many other autocratic rulers throughout the MENA region during this time attempted similar tactics, most did not end up working in their favor. Consequently, the case of Bahrain provides for an interesting research opportunity to uncover the specific kind of repression methods that were utilized

⁹³ Brownlee, Masoud and Reynolds, *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform*, 89-90.

⁹⁴F. Gregory Gause III, "Kings for All Seasons: How the Middle East's Monarchies Survived the Arab Spring" (Analysis Paper Number 8, Brookings Doha Center, September 2013), 11.

by the government's security forces which prevented the onset of civil war from occurring. In order to conduct an in-depth examination into the explicit dynamics of the uprising, data was collected from five sources, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the U.S. State Department, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry and the Political Terror Scale, that were specifically related to the repression tactics of the regime. The material was coded accordingly and sorted into four, overarching categories of repression which are as follows: violent, nonviolent, indiscriminate and selective. Tallying up the total number of times each kind of repression method was carried out helped in determining the theme of the three phases of the uprising. A chronological presentation of the events that took place will be given along with a systematic application of thematic analysis that will unmask the distinct kind of state repression tactics that had a deterring or escalatory effect on the momentum of the protest movements. This will allow me to see if the first hypothesis of this thesis is supported or not, which predicts that indiscriminate and violent repression will accelerate protest movements while selective and violent repression will end in a victory for the government. A thick description of the interactions between the state security forces and the demonstrators will be given to emphasize how it ultimately led to the regime's success.

Timeline of the Uprising – Phase One (February 14 – February 18)

The first stage of the uprising was relatively short, lasting for only five days, but nonetheless, a consistent patterned response regarding the repression tactics of the state's security forces and signals from external actors can still be clearly observed. Like many other authoritarian leaders during this time that were attempting to overcome the protest movements erupting within their own territories, the ruling al-Khalifa family followed suit and chose to use violent force against nonviolent demonstrators with the hopes of deterring them from continuing to rise up against the regime. But unlike many authoritarian leaders during this time, the international community's vague response to the uprising taking place in Bahrain showed their strong determination to sustain the current regime as cheap signals were consistently sent to emphasize their unwavering

support to the al-Khalifa family, whereas many other dictators in the MENA region were immediately condemned for their barbaric reaction towards peaceful protesters.

On February 14th, protesters peacefully gathered at one of the most popular plazas, Pearl Roundabout, in the capital city, Manama, essentially taking a page out of the tactics Egyptian protesters used when they decided to hold their mass demonstrations in Cairo's Tahrir Square. This site was a symbolic one because not only did the statute that lies in the center of this main traffic circle represent the country's pearl-diving past, it was also situated in the heart of Bahrain, making it an ideal location to host the first large-scale protests.⁹⁵ The riot police responded to the situation in an unnecessary and shockingly inhuman manner as large quantities of teargas were hurled into the colossal crowd of protesters along with an abundance of rubber bullets that were shot at them as well. Eventually they opened fire with live ammunition as a final attempt to disperse the massive amounts of people that were continuing to occupy the area. By the end of the day, a single fatality was recorded, as one protester was killed by the riot police.⁹⁶ The repression methods utilized by the state security forces in this instance are classified as violent and selective as those who were actively engaged in protesting were targeted with severe aggression.

On February 15th, a funeral procession was held in honor of the protester who was killed the day prior in which thousands of Bahrainis showed up to pay their respects. Those in attendance were a mixture of people, as some were involved in the demonstrations from the 14th while others had not been associated with them whatsoever. But when the riot police showed up to the scene, they concluded that the majority of those present had partaken in the events of the previous day and acting on this "logic" they haphazardly opened fire on everyone in mourning with live ammunition, rubber bullets and teargas.⁹⁷ In this case, the tactics of the riot police are categorized as violent and indiscriminate because they targeted people while they were grieving the loss of a

⁹⁵ Kristen Boon, Aziz Z. Huq and Douglas C. Lovelace, *Terrorism: Commentary on Security Documents*, vol. 123, *Global Stability and U.S. National Security* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 539.

⁹⁶ "Bahrain: Stop Attacks on Peaceful Protesters," *Human Rights Watch*, February 15, 2011.

⁹⁷ "Bahrain: Two Die as Protests Are Violently Repression: 'Ali 'Abdulahdi Mushaima', Fadhel 'Ali Matrook," *Amnesty International*, February 15, 2011.

fellow Bahraini and were visibly not engaged in any form of protest during the time of attack.

Additionally, on this day as well, half way across the world the U.S. Department of State was gearing up to issue one of their first press releases regarding the unraveling situation in the small Gulf archipelago. In the report, it expressed America's growing concern with the path the uprising was starting to take but whole-heartedly welcomed the al-Khalifa regime's 'pledge' to uncover and hold accountable those who were responsible for the deaths of the unarmed demonstrators.⁹⁸ This statement is classified as a cheap signal that was pro-government as it merely articulated the United State's stance towards one of their most vital allies in the region which is that it would not publically denounce their actions but rather highlight how the U.S. supports their next moves to settle the rising tensions.

Two days later at 3AM on the 17th, security forces conducted a surprise attack on protesters who were camped out at Pearl Roundabout. According to an eyewitness at the scene, they launched "tons of teargas" into several tents without caring to check if those inside were sound asleep or not.⁹⁹ As a result of their disdain for basic humanity, there were several reports of young children injured on this day. These kind of repression tactics are characterized as violent and indiscriminate because although protesters were targeted, the majority of them were sleeping when they were viciously assaulted. To compound the atrocities that were being committed, the riot police also prevented ambulances dispatched to Pearl Roundabout from reaching the wounded and one incident was reported in which four paramedics were beaten by the security forces for attempting to break the blockade.¹⁰⁰ Prohibiting hospital vehicles from entering the main parameters to rescue those in dire need of assistance qualifies as a nonviolent and indiscriminate repression tactic as medical personnel were stopped from performing their duties of treating the wounded. But assaulting these same medical personnel while they were

⁹⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Recent Protests* (February 15, 2011).

⁹⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011: Bahrain* (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2012), 18.

¹⁰⁰ "Bahrain: Allow Medical Care, Investigate Attacks on Medics," *Human Rights Watch*, February 18, 2011.

trying to pick up the injured is a kind of indiscriminate and violent repression technique as they were attacked for merely doing their job. Throughout the remainder of the day, the government enforced travel bans on some of the country's most vocal political activists, thus preventing them from fleeing Bahrain to avoid being arbitrarily detained by the security forces who were tasked with ensuring their silence during this tumultuous period of unrest.¹⁰¹ This is grouped as a type of selective and nonviolent repression method because it violates a specific group of people's right to freedom of movement as those who were targeted were well-known critics of the regime.

As February 18th rolled around, thousands more Bahrainis had uniformly taken to the streets to voice their strong condemnation of the regime's ongoing use of violent force against unarmed demonstrators and they demanded justice for those who had been injured and killed by the security forces in addition to still continuing to call on the government to meet their political, social and economic demands.¹⁰² The protests at Pearl Roundabout resumed and as predicted, the security forces once again responded with the same violent and selective repression tactics that they had used in the days' prior as bouts of teargas, rubber bullets and live ammunition were dispersed throughout the crowds. They also applied these same measures against protesters who were praying near Pearl Roundabout, but since the people targeted were not involved in demonstrating at the time of attack, this instance is classified as a case of indiscriminate and violent repression.¹⁰³ Lastly, they maintained their blockade against ambulances trying access to Pearl Roundabout, showing once again their continued use of nonviolent and indiscriminate tactics.

This day saw the first condemnation, not of the Bahraini regime per se, but rather of their security forces' choice of weaponry, as Ms. Pillay, the United Nation's former High Commissioner for Human Rights, heavily censured the use of military-grade

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry. *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry* (Presented in Manama, Bahrain, November 23, 2011), 76.

¹⁰³ "Bahrain: Army, Police Fire on Protesters," *Human Rights Watch*, February 18, 2011.

shotguns against peaceful protesters.¹⁰⁴ There was a clear-cut attempt not to criticize the actual government of Bahrain but merely slap them on the wrist by announcing that the international community disapproved of this type of aggression towards its citizens who were actively involved in protesting. This statement is classified as a cheap signal as it simply articulated that this type of force was not tolerable to various member states within the UN. Also, airing on February 18th was former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton's interview with *ABC's This Week* host, Christiane Amanpour. In an attempt to get a straight answer out of Secretary Clinton, Mrs. Amanpour tried to pin her in a corner when she asked the taboo question, "Will the United States condemn or hold Bahrain to the same standard as we saw them hold Egypt?" To which Secretary Clinton responded, "These are individual national events that respond to some of the same but often different impulses. And so we've repeatedly said we want to see reform go forward, we want to see it done peacefully, we want to see it inclusive, we want to see countries move toward democracy. And we will keep saying that."¹⁰⁵ Essentially, perfecting the art of 'beating-around-the-bush', she avoided publically criticizing their strategic ally in the Gulf. This signal is categorized as cheap and pro-government as it does not denounce the regime but rather shows the United State's continued hopefulness in the Bahraini regime to achieve meaningful dialogue with its opposition to implement real change in the country.

The Theme of Phase One of the Uprising

During this beginning stage, the most prevalent kind of repression that was utilized by the state's security forces was indiscriminate and violent, alluding to the first theme of the uprising which is that the use of these types of repression tactics against civilians and unarmed demonstrators only succeeded in escalating the momentum of the protest movements. Although the riot police also carried out more selective measures as well to quell the emerging unrest, their excessive use of force against innocent bystanders, grieving civilians, medical personnel and resting protesters alongside their sleeping children caused mass outrage among the majority of Bahrainis which prompted

¹⁰⁴ United Nations, Department of Public Information, *Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General*, (SG/SM/13407, February 18, 2011).

¹⁰⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Interview with Christiane Amanpour of ABC's This Week* (February 18, 2011).

them to take to the streets. Unlike selective repression techniques in which only active protest participants and their main collaborators are targeted, indiscriminate repression is carried out at a higher level of aggregation that cannot, or does not care to adequately differentiate between those involved in demonstrations and those who are not.¹⁰⁶ The most frequent type of this kind of tactic throughout this period was indiscriminate repression that was directed at people simply by their location. The government ordered the security forces to use unnecessary force but when they dispersed teargas, rubber bullets and live ammunition upon people mourning during a funeral procession, against harmless citizens praying near Pearl Roundabout, on protesters deep in slumber and at doctors attempting to rescue the wounded it engendered mass amounts people which caused them to become anti-regime activists. In addition, these same violent tactics were perpetrated against peaceful protesters that only further added to the utter outrage of Bahrainis as citizens were merely exercising their right to freedom of assembly which did not warrant this kind of ferocious state response. Also, in almost all instances, the police and security forces resorted to the disproportionate use of teargas and rubber bullets to disband large crowds of demonstrators in a manner that did not take into account whether or not they would cause minimal or fatal injuries to the protesters. Lastly, opening fire on unarmed dissidents and defenseless bystanders when the military troops themselves were not subjected to any immediate threat of serious injury or death emphasizes the fact that they clearly should have used significantly less lethal means when confronting civilians.

The escalation theory of civil war onset predicts that when a regime's security forces respond to initially nonviolent movements with such brutal measures it causes citizens to view regular channels for initiating political change as off-limits to them while concurrently adding to the grievances that they already have.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, this theory states that protesters, in a last attempt to get the state to implement their desired changes, will mobilize a significant amount of the population to join them in their demonstrations.

¹⁰⁶ Philip Hultquist, "Rebel Threat, State Repression and the Intensity of Internal Armed Conflict: Unpacking Endogenous Escalation" (Paper presented at the International Studies Association, San Diego, CA, April 2012), 5.

¹⁰⁷ David A. Armstrong II., Christian Davenport and Mark I. Lichbach, "Conflict Escalation and the Origins of Civil War" (Working Paper, University of Maryland, 2006), 35-36.

This is precisely what occurred in the first stage of the Bahraini uprising as the protests which ensued on the 18th had the highest number of active participants recorded to date. The reason why thousands of citizens decided to join the rallies was to voice their strong condemnation against the regime's ongoing use of violent and indiscriminate repression methods that were being used against unarmed demonstrators and harmless civilians in which they wanted justice for, in addition to remaining steadfast in calling on the government to meet their political, social and economic demands. Although it was surprising that the demonstrators had yet to resort to violent tactics that mirrored the regime's despite the state's increase in the use of violent and indiscriminate repression techniques. What can account for this seemingly startling scenario is the use of cheap and pro-government signals from the international community, in spite of the escalating brutality, which sent a message to the regime's oppositional forces that they would be willing to step in on behalf of the al-Khalifa family if the situation started to steer towards a path not to their liking. As on February 15th and 18th, statements were made from various UN and U.S. representatives that briefly acknowledged the rising tensions in the country but refused to overtly condemn the regime for violently suppressing unarmed demonstrators and only continued to announce their shared feeling of hopefulness that a national dialogue would take place to help end the ongoing unrest. This essentially signaled to the regime that they could continue responding to the protest movements with their usual tactics as the international community was not going to publically denounce their activities, giving them a type of 'free-pass' to put down the uprising by any means.

But the next moves of the ruling al-Khalifa family were very critical as they had the potential to escalate the momentum of the protests closer to the onset of civil war. It was during this period that the uprising most closely resembled that of Syria's. Had the regime continued to increase their tactics of utilizing indiscriminate and violent repression with the hopes of halting the protest movements from gaining more strength it would have likely pushed activists towards more rebellious strategies to achieve their desired goals.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Mohammad M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), 75.

Timeline of the Uprisings – Phase Two (February 19 – March 15)

The second stage of the uprising is characterized by the regime's attempted efforts at offering mild concessions which were expected to bring about political quiescence. By utilizing a different, nonviolent approach, the government hoped that this would put an end to the ongoing unrest. In addition, during this period the number of signals that were sent in favor of the regime almost doubled as many praised King Hamad for taking the initiative in trying to mitigate the country's internal strife by means of a national dialogue between the government and its main opposition to help steer Bahrain back towards regime stability.

This explains why on February 19th, under the strong influence of Crown Prince Salman, King Hamad ordered all military personnel to withdraw their troops from Pearl Roundabout. For around two whole weeks, the security forces were nowhere to be seen as they were instructed to allow the demonstrators to peacefully organize.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, since it seemingly appeared that the government had finally decided to end its campaign of brutally suppressing all forms of dissent, citizens also did not feel compelled to revert to more violent styles of protest and thus they continued their use of pacific methods instead. Also on this day, the U.S. Department of State was overtly positive in their commendation towards the Bahraini regime's new strategy of addressing its citizen's grievances. Former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, was ecstatic when she phoned Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal and articulated America's optimism that Bahrain's regional allies would also approve their new strategy of offering concessions that were in line with its peoples' demands as a constructive path towards rebuilding the country back to its former stable self.¹¹⁰ This is classified as a cheap and supportive signal because it was made in favor of the al-Khalifa government and also encouraged surrounding countries to back the regime's newfound efforts as well.

However, contrary to the regime's belief that proposing minor concessions would decrease these kinds of activities, the number of people that attended the demonstrations

¹⁰⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011: Bahrain* (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2012), 19.

¹¹⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Secretary Clinton's Call with Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia* (February 20, 2011).

at Pearl Roundabout on the 22nd reached a skyrocketing 150,000 participants.¹¹¹ The main reason behind the growing momentum of the protest movements was the riot police's barbaric use of force against defenseless demonstrators during the initial phase of the uprising. But despite this, on the same day, UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon greeted King Hamad's decision to engage in discussions with the country's anti-regime demonstrators with open arms and announced that if requested, the United Nations would be ready to help implement this process.¹¹² This statement qualifies as a cheap and supportive signal that borders on the verge of being a costly one as it alludes to the fact that the UN would be willing to aid Bahrain in reaching negotiations with its opposition.

On the next day, February 23rd, due to the escalation, King Hamad enacted further measures to appease civilians demands as he released 23 political activists from prison who had been detained since August 2010.¹¹³ In addition to this, he also announced that February 25th would be a national day of mourning for those that were killed during the uprising.¹¹⁴

However, on the morning of February 25th, the anticipated state-wide day of grievance was met with substantial anti-government demonstrations as almost 40% of the Bahraini population reportedly showed up to signify that they still wanted the officers responsible for injuring and killing the peaceful protesters to be held accountable for their actions, tried in a court of law and brought to justice and simply declaring a national day of mourning was not going to appease them.¹¹⁵ But the unwillingness of the regime to acknowledge these demands did not help their case as their continued inaction only further infuriated civilians. Despite this, King Hamad was still adamant that acceding to

¹¹¹ Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry* (Presented in Manama, Bahrain, November 23, 2011), 88.

¹¹² United Nations, Department of Public Information, *Secretary-General Reiterates Call for Utmost Restraint as Violence, Bloodshed Escalate across North Africa, Middle East* (SG/SM/13407, February 22, 2011).

¹¹³ "Bahrain: Further Information: Activists Released Following Bahrain Protests," *Amnesty International*, February 24, 2011.

¹¹⁴ Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry* (Presented in Manama, Bahrain, November 23, 2011), 90.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

some of the protesters' demands would quell the uprising's momentum which is why on the 26th he altered several cabinet positions that entailed removing two al-Khalifa family members from their posts to slightly reduce the royal clan's dominance.¹¹⁶ The new associates filled the cabinet seats which had the power to improve people's living conditions and create more job opportunities but this calculated move did not have a deterrent effect on the demonstrators who continued to turn out in large numbers.

Although these mild reforms did not stop the plethora of proclamations coming in from the international community as they continued to voice their staunch support for the Bahraini regime and for the next week only costly and cheap signals were sent in favor of the ruling al-Khalifa family. On March 2nd, the Gulf Cooperation Council unleashed their master plan to assist Oman and Bahrain in ending the domestic conflict going on in both their countries through massive aid packages that would provide better economic opportunities for all their citizens and was hoped to halt the large demonstrations from continuing to take place. An undisclosed source speaking on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council told *Gulf News* that, "The political regime in Bahrain has full support from the GCC countries."¹¹⁷ By offering such large monetary installments to the Bahraini government sent a costly signal to their opposition that the GCC was going to maintain their patronage to their loyal member state no matter the price. On the following day, the U.S. Department of State sent out yet another press release describing how Bahrain has been a long-standing ally to America which is why they would remain committed to ensuring that the national dialogue with its citizens would result in some type of negotiated settlements.¹¹⁸ A few days later on March 10th, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon again reiterated the United Nation's readiness to provide material support to the nationally-led endeavors if they were invited to do so by the Bahraini regime and called on the country's neighbors and the larger international community to also show their support for the dialogue process which was conducive for credible agreements to be

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 92.

¹¹⁷ "GCC Marshall-Style Package for Bahrain, Oman," *Gulf News*, March 2, 2011.

¹¹⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Assistant Secretary Feltman Comments on Bahrain* (March 3, 2011).

implemented in Bahrain.¹¹⁹ On this same day, the United Arab Emirates Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahayan, speaking on behalf of the GCC, emphasized their support for the continued peace talks and stated that the Council would, “Expect all Bahrainis will be willing to support this approach.”¹²⁰ Both of these announcements from representatives of the UN and the GCC are grouped together and coded as cheap, pro-government signals as they were both sent to highlight these organizations backing of the Bahraini regime through their ongoing statements of support for their attempts at using nonviolent means to end hostilities.

But as the days progressed, it was clear to see that the national dialogue between the government and the main opposition group, al-Wifaq, had failed to achieve any meaningful negotiations. Up until this period, the protests had normally remained stationary at Pearl Roundabout, but on March 12th the demonstrators organized anti-regime marches that headed towards the Royal Court in al-Riffa as well as the University of Bahrain, in attempts to spur the state into finally acting in their favor by implementing their multiplying demands.¹²¹ But both demonstrations ended violently as anti-regime protesters encountered regime supporters who were allegedly armed with sticks and knives and thus both sides began to attack one another. Further reports from this day also described how the anti-government demonstrators assaulted some students at the University of Bahrain and committed acts of vandalism as well.¹²² Although these two incidents do not fit under any repression category as the tactics were not carried out by the state but rather by two different protest groups against one another, it is still important to mention because it signifies how the uprising was starting to become more violent.

The next day, the demonstrators resumed their former peaceful activities, though they were becoming noticeably more disruptive, especially for citizens trying to carryout

¹¹⁹ United Nations, Department of Public Information, *Secretary-General Calls on All Parties in Bahrain to Address Reforms, Engage in Peaceful, Broad-based Reconciliation Process* (SG/SM/13434, March 10, 2011).

¹²⁰ “Sectarian Clashes at Bahrain School,” *Al Jazeera*, March 10, 2011.

¹²¹ Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry* (Presented in Manama, Bahrain, November 23, 2011), 122.

¹²² *Ibid*, 123.

their everyday errands as protesters began to block off the main roads in Manama, preventing anyone from passing through. In addition to this, they also started to occupy Bahrain's Financial Harbor district, causing extreme distress for the ruling al-Khalifa family as they feared that important infrastructure would be damaged in retaliation. This prompted the regime to awaken the riot police from their slumber and send them in to mitigate the situation using their former tactics as teargas, rubber bullets and live ammunition were dispersed throughout the crowds of people blocking the main roads and against those at Pearl Roundabout.¹²³ In both of these situations, the repression methods of the riot police are categorized as selective and violent as the people who were targeted were actively involved in protesting or were hindering others from passing through the central streets. Later on that night, King Hamad decided to seek guidance from his GCC neighbors on how to handle the unraveling state of affairs.

On March 15th, the King declared a 3-month 'State of National Safety' which essentially equipped the government with a wide range of capabilities to do as they pleased in order to protect the welfare of Bahrainis.¹²⁴ This Royal Decree qualifies as a kind of nonviolent and indiscriminate repression tactic as it effected everyone in the country by restricting several of their basic civil liberties that were outlined under the various articles describing the powers of the government during this three-month period. In addition to this, the King also announced that he requested assistance from the GCC's Joint Security Forces which were expected to arrive on the following day. This caused tensions to reach an all-time high as the majority of citizens were enraged at the fact that outside forces were granted the ability to meddle in the domestic affairs of Bahrain.¹²⁵

As a result, numerous spouts of violence ensued throughout the day in several Shia villages that were put down by the riot police who responded to them in an identical fashion with teargas, rubber bullets and live ammunition, making these more cases in which violent and selective repression tactics were used. Reports also surfaced in which witnesses described how the security forces were aimlessly firing teargas and rubber

¹²³ "Bahrain: Martial Law Does Not Trump Basic Rights," *Human Rights Watch*, March 16, 2011.

¹²⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011: Bahrain* (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2012), 1.

¹²⁵ "Bahrain: Eight Activists Detained in Bahrain," *Amnesty International*, March 18, 2011.

bullets into a local medical center in Sitra as well as how they were launching teargas canisters into the Bahrain International Hospital without entering.¹²⁶ Lastly, they also attacked several ambulances leaving Salmaniya hospital that were on their way to reach injured demonstrators at Pearl Roundabout.¹²⁷ Each of these cases were grouped together and coded as incidents in which the regime's security forces carried out indiscriminate and violent repression techniques as targeting hospital buildings is simply atrocious as is physically assaulting medical vehicles.

After the events of the day had concluded, the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, issued a formal statement that proclaimed the EU's growing concern about the seriousness of the level of force being inflicted upon unarmed protesters on the central streets of Manama, the country's capital city and their fears that the increasing sectarian rhetoric would only lead to more violence not only between the demonstrators themselves but also against the Bahraini security forces as well. But despite the government's resumed use of violent repression tactics she still refrained from explicitly calling out the regime and continued to reiterate the recycled response, "I call on all the security forces present to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. I urge all sides to take the necessary steps to create the conditions to allow serious, comprehensive and constructive dialogue to proceed without delay."¹²⁸ This statement qualifies as a cheap supportive signal towards the ruling al-Khalifa family and the protesters as the announcement conveyed to both parties the EU's hopefulness towards a nonviolent strategy to end the resumed aggression.

Theme of Phase Two of the Uprising

Throughout this second phase, the use of state repression was hardly seen as King Hamad tried to show the protesters a sign of goodwill by ordering the state security forces to retreat from Pearl Roundabout. He hoped that offering mild concessions would

¹²⁶ "Bahrain: Injured People Denied Medical Care," *Human Rights Watch*, March 17, 2011.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ European Union, *Statement by the High Representative Catherine Ashton on the Situation in Bahrain* (March 15, 2011).

cause citizens to cease their current activities in exchange for resolving their issues with the regime through more discursive practices instead, but after citizens had witnessed the brutality inflicted on unarmed protesters and innocent civilians, their demands had multiplied and became more extreme than before. This brings attention to the next theme of the uprising which is that the attempted concessions failed to appease protesters ever-growing demands causing their behavior to become more disruptive in nature that resulted in the regime's return to violent, but more selective repression techniques to halt the rapidly increasing momentum of the protests. But the regime's refusal to compromise with the opposition was also compounded by the fact that they had received an abundance of cheap, pro-government signals from multiple international, regional and domestic organizations that hindered their willingness to reach negotiations that were acceptable to all parties. Since it was in both the West and the GCC's best strategic interests for the Bahraini regime to remain in power, they hoped their signals would influence the outcome of the settlements or at the very best influence the expectations of the regime's main conflict protagonists from backing down on their demands to shape the outcome of the uprising to their liking.¹²⁹

The dialogue that ensued between Crown Prince Salman and the largest opposition group, al-Wifaq, was thought to be the end-all solution that would finally bring the ongoing unrest to a close as this organization was believed to have the capacity to effectively articulate the specific desires of the demonstrators to the ruling family that would result in the establishment of mutually agreed upon negotiations. This ideal situation would have been more probable before the security forces violently suppressed peaceful demonstrators and civilians during the initial phase of the uprising as citizen's demands were not so unfathomable for the regime at this point. The most common calls were for the establishment of a fully-elected parliament, an end to the gerrymandering of electoral districts to favor Sunnis over Shiites, better job opportunities for all Bahrainis and the removal of the hardline Prime Minister and member of the royal family, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa, the world's longest-serving premier, who has held this

¹²⁹ Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Kyle Beardsley, "Nosy Neighbors: Third-Party Actors in Central American Conflicts," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 3 (2004): 379-402.

position since 1971.¹³⁰

However, the uprising, which was originally incited by regional developments transformed overtime due to the sheer outrage many Bahrainis felt towards the regime after seeing the barbaric response from the security forces against the pacific movement that was starting to emerge. Since indiscriminate and violent repression tactics were carried out against the citizenry it mobilized former inactive civilians to join in the dissident activities because of the rage that this type of violence provokes which gives people the motivation needed to join the cause and not fear the consequences of doing so.¹³¹ The original demands of the protesters started to escalate from mild constitutional reforms to more radical ultimatums such as the highly vocalized call for a republic.¹³² These few, hesitant attempts towards formal agreements were short-lived as al-Wifaq refused to compromise on one of their main issues which was to establish a real constitutional monarchy, not simply the façade of one, where the Prime Minister and the rest of the cabinet members would be chosen by a fully elected parliament. Since the protesters wanted more from the regime than originally stated, the government became increasingly more unwilling to reach a compromise than before which resulted in the overall failure of the concessions as they no longer would please such a highly dissatisfied population.

While all of this was occurring, the uprising was continuing to gain a significant amount of supporters daily. The regime's initial use of violent and indiscriminate repression was essentially responsible for brining about this second, larger wave of protesters to the streets, as an increasing percentage of the opposition started to believe that the government was neither legitimate nor capable of enacting any meaningful reforms.¹³³ Feeling considerably threatened, the government lashed out by completely

¹³⁰ Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry. *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry* (Presented in Manama, Bahrain, November 23, 2011), 88.

¹³¹ Charles D. Brockett, "A Protest-Cycle Resolution of the Repression/Popular-Protest Paradox," *Social Science History* 17, no. 3 (1993): 473.

¹³² Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry. *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 85.

¹³³ James L. Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 93-94.

ending discussions on the future possibility of reform and during the final days of this second stage, they ordered the security forces to resort back to their initial repression techniques. This meant that the ongoing demonstrations at Pearl Roundabout, the Financial Harbor district, throughout the main streets of Manama and in several Shia villages were once again met with loads of teargas, rubber bullets and an overabundance of live ammunition. Thus far, the path of the Bahraini uprising has continued to support the escalation theory of civil war onset as it emphasizes how the use of violent and indiscriminate repression against unarmed demonstrators and innocent civilians mobilized more than half of the population onto the streets to demand action and justice for those injured and killed by the regime's security forces, although the dissidents at this point had yet to turn to more violent means to reach their goals.

The overall theme of the second phase of the Bahraini uprising highlights the fact that the failed concessions led to a return to the use of violent but more *selective* repression tactics. But the failure to reach any mutually acceptable concessions stemmed from the regime's initial use of violent and *indiscriminate* repression tactics against peaceful protesters which escalated demonstrator's demands to such an extent that the government was no longer willing to compromise, but in addition to this, what also influenced the al-Khalifa regime from refusing to negotiate was due to the cheap and costly supportive signals it received from the international community. For starters, after the GCC decided to give the country enormous concessions in the form of monetary payments that were anticipated to appease the majority of citizen's grievances it sent a message to the opposition that the Bahraini government would have outside backing no matter what direction the protest movements took. Such costly signals require a very high level of commitment and generally work to deter regime dissidents from continuing to engage in their current tactics as the signaling parties show the opposition that they do not stand a chance if they continue to carry on with their calls to topple the regime.¹³⁴

Also, the United Nations, European Union and U.S. Department of State repeatedly restated their commitment towards helping the Bahraini regime if necessary to

¹³⁴James D. Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (1997): 70.

carry out a friendly national dialogue with its main dissidents so that the ongoing unrest would finally be put to bed. This sent a clear message to the protesters but their lingering disgust with the security forces initial use of indiscriminate and violent repression against unarmed demonstrators and innocent civilians hindered their willingness to accede on any of their demands against the regime. But the government on the other hand, did not feel compelled to compromise on any of the oppositions terms to end the ongoing unrest because they felt that they had strong support from the international community due to the cheap, pro-government signals they continuously made. Eventually, the dissidents started to realize in the third phase of the uprising that they would have to accept defeat as the signals being sent were not in their favor and the regime would likely triumph over them, especially combined with their new repression tactics that were more *selective* in nature.¹³⁵

Timeline of the Uprisings – Phase Three (March 16 – April 1)

On March 16th, around 1,500 members from the GCC's Joint Security Forces arrived in Bahrain during the early morning. They were instructed to safeguard important government installations in the Financial Harbor district and were ordered to refrain from actively engaging with the protesters as this task was solely reserved for the Bahraini security forces.¹³⁶ The riot police cleared Pearl Roundabout by dispersing copious amounts of teargas and rubber bullets while proceeding to open fire with live ammunition against any remaining demonstrators, making this another instance in which violent and selective repression tactics were used.¹³⁷ The security forces also resumed more of their old tactics as they started to divert cars away from Salmaniya hospital and prevented ambulances there from entering or exiting to assist the multitude of wounded people scattered throughout the capital city. They also hijacked the patient ward at Salmaniya to further assault people with protest-related injuries and removed those requiring urgent medical treatment to restricted areas within the hospital that were being utilized as

¹³⁵ Clayton Lynn Thyne, "Cheap Signals, Costly Consequences: How International Relations Affect Civil Conflict" (PhD. dissertation, University of Iowa, 2007), 31, 32.

¹³⁶ "Bahrain: Eight Activists Detained in Bahrain," *Amnesty International*, March 18, 2011.

¹³⁷ "Bahrain: Injured People Denied Medical Care," *Human Rights Watch*, March 17, 2011.

improvised torture sites.¹³⁸ The first two cases are grouped together as indiscriminate and nonviolent repression methods as ambulances and civilians were prevented from either seeking or providing medical assistance. The second two cases are classified as instances of indiscriminate and violent repression as the security forces were assaulting the wounded and subjecting them to prolonged periods of suffering. Lastly, throughout the remainder of the day the state began its harshest crackdown yet against prominent political opponents and all suspected pro-democracy supporters by conducting nighttime raids on all households and detaining those who fit this criteria.¹³⁹ These types of activities are branded as selective and nonviolent repression techniques as those who were imprisoned were some of the most well-known regime critics.

During the early hours of March 17th, the police continued to conduct their raids on several residences, looking for political community leaders and activists and taking them into custody.¹⁴⁰ They also detained several members of a well-known sedition ring, a popular anti-government organization that regularly and publically would call for the downfall of the regime, demand immediate democratic reforms and remained staunchly critical of the recent crackdown, another case of selective and nonviolent repression.¹⁴¹ In addition, security forces were deployed throughout predominately Shia neighborhoods and villages that were close to the capital, Manama, to monitor the situation.¹⁴² Targeting whole cities because of their specific religious sect is a type of indiscriminate and nonviolent repression technique as people are under suspicious based on factors that have nothing to do with whether or not they were involved in the protest movements that were sweeping across the nation.

¹³⁸ Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry* (Presented in Manama, Bahrain, November 23, 2011), 201.

¹³⁹ "Bahrain: State of Fear Prevails with Arbitrary Detentions, Pre-Dawn Raids," *Human Rights Watch*, April 7, 2011.

¹⁴⁰ "Bahrain's Human Rights Crisis," *Human Rights Watch*, July 5, 2011.

¹⁴¹ "Bahrain: Protest Leaders Arbitrarily Detained," *Human Rights Watch*, March 18, 2011.

¹⁴² U.S. Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2011: Bahrain* (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2012), 8.

On March 18th, the government demolished the monument at Pearl Roundabout, a very symbolic move but nonetheless a case of nonviolent and selective repression as the statute was emblematic of the site where the beginning of the uprising began.¹⁴³ The following day, security forces raided the home of Dr. Nada Dhaif and arrested her for appearing on an al-Jazeera broadcast speaking about the current events in the country.¹⁴⁴ This is classified as a case of selective and nonviolent repression because she was specifically detained for exercising her right to freedom of speech by discussing the situation in Bahrain which painted the regime in a negative light. On March 20th, another similar instance occurred as around 20 to 25 armed men alongside dozens of uniformed riot police went to the home Nabeel Rajab, the President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights and a member of the Middle East advisory committee for Human Rights Watch, and broke down his door, confiscated some files as well as a computer and proceeded to take him into custody.¹⁴⁵ Since he was arrested for his human rights work this is categorized as a case of selective and nonviolent repression. The next day, on the 21st, a well-known opposition activist, Salah al-Khawaja was arrested, adding to the tally of instances of selective and nonviolent repression.¹⁴⁶

These actions prompted Rupert Colville, the spokesperson for the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to publically announce that the situation in Bahrain was getting very worrisome as he stated, “It is vital that the authorities scrupulously abide by international standards. People should not be arbitrarily arrested and should not be detained without clear evidence that they have committed a recognized crime. We stress again that demonstrating peacefully is not a crime. Giving an

¹⁴³ Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry* (Presented in Manama, Bahrain, November 23, 2011), 150.

¹⁴⁴ “Bahrain: Further Information: Further Arrests of Activists and Doctor,” *Amnesty International*, March 23, 2011.

¹⁴⁵ “Bahrain: New Arrests Target Doctors, Rights Activists,” *Human Rights Watch*, March 20, 2011.

¹⁴⁶ “Bahrain: Further Information: Further Arrests of Activists and Doctor,” *Amnesty International*, March 23, 2011.

interview to a journalist is not by any stretch of the imagination a crime, nor is reporting human rights abuses.”¹⁴⁷

But by the end of the month, the regime had detained around 400 people and many were held in incommunicado detention as their whereabouts remained a mystery to their family and friends, and it was reported that only six of them had access to a lawyer before their trials.¹⁴⁸ The nation-wide apprehension of the most prominent leaders of political opposition groups, citizens who were the main organizers of the protest movements as well as doctors, teachers and defense lawyers qualifies as selective/indiscriminate and nonviolent repression techniques, as certain people were arrested because of their highly public leadership roles that regularly were very critical of the regime rendering it as selective while others such as medical personnel were simply targeted for trying to save the injured make it indiscriminate as well.

By April 1st the Bahraini uprising had been crushed.

Theme of Phase Three of the Uprising

The switch from indiscriminate and violent repression techniques to ones that were violent albeit more selective during the final phase of the uprising was one of the main reasons why the ruling al-Khalifa family was successful at returning the country back to regime stability. Also, the unexpected more frequent use of indiscriminate and nonviolent repression tactics also added to the country’s success in addition to the cheap and costly signals from external actors that remained in strong support of the regime. Therefore, the final theme is that a combination of all of these factors resulted in the government’s victory as they were finally able to put an end to the ongoing unrest.

The declaration of the State of National Safety which was applied on the population as a whole was a type of indiscriminate repression tactic as everyone was effected by it and during this period people’s right to freedom of assembly was severely restricted as gatherings of any kind were banned. The security forces were extremely relentless as all protesters at Pearl Roundabout were continually dispersed with teargas,

¹⁴⁷ United Nations, Department of Public Information, *UN human rights office voices concern at recent events in Yemen, Bahrain and Syria* (March 22, 2011).

¹⁴⁸ “Bahrain Continues to Detain Protestors: Further Information,” *Amnesty International*, April 11, 2011.

rubber bullets and live ammunition. But on top of the government's selective and violent measures to disband all demonstrations, they carried out a mass arrest campaign throughout the remainder of the month in which civilians who were only suspected of supporting the uprising were detained, in addition to doctors and other medical personnel who were arrested for treating those wounded during clashes with the regime. This is classified as indiscriminate and nonviolent repression as people were targeted based merely on suspicion that they sympathized with the protesters or secretly supported their activities. Also, taking doctors and nurses into custody for performing their duties of caring to those requiring medical care is another form of indiscriminate and nonviolent repression. Although the mass arrest campaign is also classified as selective and nonviolent repression as prominent government opponents, human rights activists and the most vocal regime critics were detained, the majority of those that were taken into custody either had no involvement in the demonstrations themselves or they simply supported their cause as well as the medical personnel who were also detained.

What was also taking place during the mass arrest campaign was a systematic purge of employees from various companies who were suspected of supporting the protest movements or participating in them. A June 29th news release from *Human Rights Watch*, reported that over 2,000 people had been fired from their jobs for allegedly being absent from work during and immediately after the period in which protests had taken place.¹⁴⁹ But several of those interviewed said that according to law, in order for their employers to fire them, they would have had to be absent from work for 10 consecutive days and on the 5th day they were to receive a formal warning, however no one recalled getting any kind of written notice and several had only been gone from work for around two or three days. More reports also surfaced that stated that the University of Bahrain laid off around 100 faculty and staff members for supposedly attending the demonstrations. Lastly, at the beginning of April, it was recorded that at least 500 students were suspended or expelled from their universities for supporting or actively participating in the uprising. Also, students that were studying abroad who had been involved in the protests had lost their government scholarships.¹⁵⁰ All of these instances

¹⁴⁹ "Bahrain's Human Rights Crisis," *Human Rights Watch*, July 5, 2011.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

are grouped together and coded as cases of indiscriminate and nonviolent repression techniques as people lost their jobs, were banned from school and lost their scholarships for simply being suspected of involvement, supporting or sympathizing with the protesters and their demonstrations.

Finally, all four sources, *Human Rights Watch*, *Amnesty International*, the U.S. State Department and the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, had no documented cases in which the GCC's Joint Security Forces engaged with protesters by actively repressing them in any way, shape or form. They all described how these troops were specifically given orders to support the Bahraini authorities by guarding key government installations so they could carry out the task of brutally repressing their own citizens.¹⁵¹ They were also sent to protect the oil fields in the south of the country and were instructed to always be ready to defend Bahrain against any threat of foreign intervention.¹⁵² There were no concrete accounts in which the GCC's troops had been the sole perpetrators behind suppressing Bahraini citizens, invalidating the claim that the regime was only able to defeat the uprising thanks to these forces as invalid. But although they were not actively involved in brutally repressing the protest movements, the mere presence of the GCC forces may have had a mild deterring effect on the decision of protesters to not up their rebellious efforts towards engaging in violent conflict with the state.

This account of the events in Bahrain shows how the type and target of repression is an important component to take into consideration when attempting to predict the path of a conflict between a government and its citizens during an emerging uprising which can either metastasize into civil war onset or not. After thoroughly examining the dynamic interaction between the Bahraini regime and its citizens during the three distinct phases of the uprising it shows how the first hypothesis of this thesis is supported. Escalation theory of civil war onset states that the more indiscriminate and violent the repression tactics of a regime are, the more likely they are to up the intensity level of the

¹⁵¹ "Bahrain: A Human Rights Crisis," *Amnesty International*, April 21, 2011.

¹⁵² Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry. *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry* (Presented in Manama, Bahrain, November 23, 2011), 134.

protest movements which was exactly what occurred after the first phase of the uprising. During the initial phase, the use of indiscriminate and violent repression methods caused the momentum of the protest movements to erupt on a massive scale as the targeting of civilians based not on their actions but rather because of where they lived, their religious beliefs or their proximity to an ongoing demonstration enraged a majority of the population which caused them to join in on the action.¹⁵³ After this, the regime tried their hand at concessions but when that too proved unsuccessful they resorted back to their violent, but more selective repression tactics. In addition, it is important to note their widespread use of indiscriminate but *nonviolent* tactics during the final phase of the uprising, as several civilians were arrested, workers lost their jobs and students were dismissed from universities for their suspected involvement in or support of the protests. Data on Bahrain for the year 2011 was obtained from the Political Terror Scale which compiles an annual report on the human rights practices of all governments with the primary goal being to measure the level of violence perpetrated by states. They code the level of political terror and violence that a country undergoes in a particular year based on a 5-level “terror scale” that was originally developed by Freedom House. Bahrain received a score of “3” which states that, “There is extensive political imprisonment, or a recent history of such imprisonment, execution or other political murders and brutality may be common, unlimited detention, with or without a trial, for political views is accepted.”¹⁵⁴ This grade of a level three emphasizes the fact that the Bahraini regime shifted its tactics away from ones that were indiscriminate and violent towards repression techniques that were violent but more selective alongside methods that were also indiscriminate but nonviolent in nature that significantly contributed to their ability to return the country back to its former stable state. The overall consensus here is that the type and target of repression carried out by the government’s security forces was key in

¹⁵³ Alexander B. Downes, “Draining the Sea by Filling the Graves: Investigating the Effectiveness of Indiscriminate Violence as a Counterinsurgency Strategy,” *Civil Wars* 9, no. 4 (2007): 425.

¹⁵⁴ Mark Gibney, Linda Cornett, Reed Wood, Peter Haschke and Daniel Arnon, *The Political Terror Scale 1976-2015* (2015), <http://www.politicalterror scale.org>.

determining whether or not they would have a deterrent or backlash effect on the momentum of the protest movements.¹⁵⁵

But what was also an important component that would effect the outcome of the uprising had to do with signals from external actors. The most common types of signals that the regime received from the international community were costly and cheap pro-government ones that offered their verbal support for the ruling al-Khalifa family or gave them monetary aid to appease protesters growing demands. Signaling theory predicts that these types of signals from external actors will increase the likelihood that a regime and its opposition will reach a negotiated settlement to end the rising hostilities for several reasons. The first is that costly signals made in favor of the regime greatly impact its challenger's decision to back down and not escalate their demands while forcing them to quietly bow out of any further conflict with the state. This is because costly signals that are sent as a sign of government support are highly visible for the opposition to see thus increasing their credibility and ensuring to them that outside forces would be willing to stand by the regime at all costs necessary. These third-party alliances signal to regime dissidents what to anticipate should they still decide to increase their internal strife with the state.¹⁵⁶ Second, when pro-government cheap signals are made, although they are not as reliable as costly ones, it still causes the opposition to second guess whether or not they want to continue to carry out their activities against the regime and therefore they act as a deterrent mechanism. Any potential challengers become highly unlikely to initiate violent force against a government knowing that the rest of the international community is standing behind it.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, signals from external actors are important components which are influenced by the type and target of repression tactics carried out

¹⁵⁵ Philip Hultquist, "Rebel Threat, State Repression and the Intensity of Internal Armed Conflict: Unpacking Endogenous Escalation" (Paper presented at the International Studies Association, San Diego, CA, April 2012), 2.

¹⁵⁶ Brett Ashley Leeds, "Do Alliances Deter Aggression? The Influence of Military Alliances on the Initiation of Militarized Interstate Disputes," *American Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 3 (2003): 428-429.

¹⁵⁷ Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Kyle Beardsley, "Nosy Neighbors: Third-Party Actors in Central American Conflicts," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 3 (2004): 379-402.

by the regime that influences whether or not the momentum of protest movements will lead to civil war onset.

CHAPTER 5: SYRIA

In 1963 the Syrian Arab Republic experienced a military coup that brought the Baath Party to power and they enacted the Emergency Law that would remain intact for the next 48 years to come. Under this state of “eternal lockdown” the government limited many basic rights of its citizens to maintain their complete dominance over society, in doing so they restricted public gatherings, authorized the supervision of personal communications, permitted media censorship and declared all independent political parties illegal.¹⁵⁸ A few years later in a bloodless coup, General Hafez al-Assad assumed the office of the presidency. In order to eliminate his opponents, he went to great lengths to establish a rigid security apparatus which allowed him to sustain control of the population by severely suppressing all forms of dissent. After his death in late 2000, his son, Bashar al-Assad became the new President of Syria and continued to govern in manner that was similar to his late father, meaning that the regime still wielded absolute authority despite Bashar’s promises of reform. The government sustained the policies in place that significantly limited citizen’s right to freedom of expression, the ability to peacefully assemble and was believed to routinely torture political prisoners.¹⁵⁹ Therefore, once the Arab Spring uprisings broke out in Tunisia and Egypt, Bashar al-Assad was overly confident that his country was immune to these kinds of protest movements. During an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* in January 2011, he stated, “We have more difficult circumstances than most of the Arab countries but in spite of that Syria is stable. Why? Because you have to be very closely linked to the beliefs of the people. This is the core issue. When there is divergence between your policy and the people's beliefs and interests, you will have this vacuum that creates disturbance...Unless you understand the ideological aspect of the region, you cannot understand what is happening.”¹⁶⁰ Ironically enough, it seems that Bashar was the one who was not in tune with his people’s own ideas and values as months later the country delved into a deadly

¹⁵⁸ Freedom House, “The World’s Most Repressive Regimes” (Special Report to the 59th Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Geneva, 2003), 75.

¹⁵⁹ Robert I. Rotberg, *Worst of the Worst* (Washington, US: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 28-29.

¹⁶⁰ “Interview with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 31, 2011.

civil war which has persisted for five years now. Several have dubbed the ongoing crisis as possibly the worst humanitarian catastrophe since World War II, as it has left over a quarter million dead, nearly the same number of people missing or injured and at least half of Syria's 22 million inhabitants displaced from their homes.¹⁶¹

Background History

Many wondered how this exceedingly authoritarian regime fell victim to the Arab Spring uprisings after successfully ruling with an iron fist for so many years prior. Towards the end of 2010, the government was adamant about maintaining a watchful eye on the current unrest that was sweeping across the region and therefore they decided to implement a number of measures that were intended to appease the public while simultaneously improve their image. For starters, President Assad pardoned several people that had been convicted of major political offenses, attempted to ease economic hardships by boosting the subsidy on heating fuel and reduced taxes on basic commodities and lastly, he took small strides towards creating more job opportunities in both the public and private sectors.¹⁶² But while the regime was busy fine-tuning these new policies that they hoped would pre-empt a possible crisis, society was slowly but surely starting to fire up.

The Syrian uprising did not commence in the same fashion as other countries did where large demonstrations ensued in highly populated areas or capital cities. Instead, it came about as a quiet encroachment of small protests throughout provincial districts that each had their own specific grievances unique to their locality.¹⁶³ The movements began spontaneously as they were not coordinated through online social media sites and bore no organizational structure. At first, they were relatively small in size, peaceful in nature and addressed legitimate, age-old tribulations that they finally wanted to see resolved.

¹⁶¹ ECHO (EU Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection), "Fact Sheet: Syria Crisis," *European Commission*, 2016.

¹⁶² International Crisis Group, "Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (VI): The Syrian People's Slow Motion Revolution" (Middle East/North Africa Report no. 108, July 6, 2011), 5-6.

¹⁶³ James L. Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 74.

Although a few overarching themes could be seen within their demands, such as the persistent calls to end widespread government corruption, the desire to establish real democratic institutions, the implementation of long overdue economic reforms and an overall greater respect for the rule of law. Therefore, despite the considerable differences between the provinces, they had a shared sense of deep frustration with the regime that transcended across these disparate towns and gradually evolved into a national protest movement.¹⁶⁴

Although the government was taking minor steps to entice its citizens, they were confronted with an unsettling situation as the society that they had long contained and regulated was suddenly behaving in a way that was completely unfamiliar to them. The regimes response to the localized protests was to treat every one as an isolated incident, employ a variety of superficial negotiations mixed with minor concession and top them off by brutally inhibiting any remaining oppositionists from organizing further demonstrations. But there was something different this time around, as the barbaric methods of the regime that, for so many years, worked in suppressing any form of dissent, was no longer working in their favor. Rather, the excessive use of force led residents of all localities to rise up in solidarity with the victims of state repression as they were outraged at the regime's actions which led them to become active participants in the protest movements. Around this time, the demands of the people started to shift away from their specific grievances into a more general call to topple the regime.

But it still remains puzzling as to how one of the most consistently oppressive regimes failed to quell the momentum of the protest movements. Therefore, it provides for an interesting research opportunity to take an in-depth look at the specific kind of repression tactics that were utilized by the government's security forces that led to civil war onset instead of regime stability. In carrying out this examination into the specific dynamics of the uprising, the data was collected following the same procedures that were used when gathering information on the Bahraini uprising. To refresh, the five sources that material was obtained from that explicitly had to do with the repression tactics of the Syrian regime are Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the U.S. State

¹⁶⁴ International Crisis Group, "Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (VI): The Syrian People's Slow Motion Revolution" (Middle East/North Africa Report no. 108, July 6, 2011), 11.

Department, the UN Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the Political Terror Scale. The material was coded accordingly and sorted into the same four, overarching categories of repression: violent, nonviolent, indiscriminate and selective. A chronological presentation of the events that took place will be given along with a systematic application of thematic analysis that will unmask the distinct kind of state repression techniques that had an escalatory effect on the momentum of the protest movements to see if the first hypothesis of this thesis is supported or not, which predicts that indiscriminate and violent repression will accelerate protest movements while selective and violent repression will end in a victory for the state. A thick description of the interactions between the state security forces and the demonstrators will be given to emphasize the phases and themes of the uprising that ultimately led to the onset of civil war.

Timeline of the Uprising – Pre-Phase (January 29 – March 15)

Since the Syrian uprising did not begin in the same way as many others in the region did, it is important to understand the preceding events that led up to the first outbreak of protests. During this period, the government was very concerned with trying to pre-empt mass demonstrations from occurring as had happened in Egypt and Tunisia, which is why their main strategy was to offer concessions, closely monitor known oppositionists and attempt to persuade people from engaging in these type of activities.

Since the end of January, peaceful gatherings were held as a show of solidarity with the pro-democracy movements in Egypt and on almost all occasions security forces showed up to film and check identity papers in which they later used this information to contact those involved in these small congregations at their private residences to pressure them to stop attending these events.¹⁶⁵ On February 2nd, the authorities arrested a man in his mid-70s, Ghassan al-Najjar, after he openly called for the Syrians in Aleppo to rise up and demand more rights.¹⁶⁶ Two days later on the 4th, more than 10 well-known activists

¹⁶⁵ “Egypt-Inspired Protests Across Middle East Meet Violent Clampdown,” *Human Rights Watch*, February 8, 2011.

¹⁶⁶ “Urgent Action: Syrian Blogger Held Incommunicado,” *Amnesty International*, February 22, 2011.

were summoned by police officers who insisted that they should refrain from organizing any type of demonstrations.¹⁶⁷

In the first and third cases, although the regime did not exactly hinder people's right to freedom of assembly, by attempting to coerce citizens to cease their activities acted as a warning sign of what was to come if they continued to disobey these wishes. But the second incident where a man was arrested for openly expressing his opinions and ideas violates his right to freedom of speech. Therefore, this is categorized as a type of nonviolent and selective repression tactic because he was specifically detained due to the public statement he made against the government and which they feared could incite a possible crisis for them. This was essentially how the pre-phase period to the protest movements occurred, as once civilians started to muster the courage to speak out against these long-standing oppressive measures, the regime's security apparatuses were quick to pre-empt any situation from spiraling out of control.

But in the southwestern city of Dara'a on March 6th, the regime had taken their strategy of pre-empting all political opponents way too far as police arrested roughly fifteen school children between the ages of 10-15 for spray painting one of their school walls with the phrase, "The people want to topple the regime."¹⁶⁸ This sparked major outrage from Dara'a residents, especially the children's parents, as they were only kids who were not intending to stage mass demonstrations themselves but were merely mimicking popular slogans from other Arab Spring uprisings. Therefore, although they were writing anti-regime sayings, this still qualifies as a kind of indiscriminate, not selective, repression tactic due to the innocence that comes with their young age as some could not even be considered as "pre-teens" yet. It is labeled as nonviolent for now because it was initially unfathomable that the security forces would have the audacity to inflict pain on harmless children.

Timeline of the Uprising – Phase One (March 16 – April 7)

¹⁶⁷ "Syria: Free Elderly Activist Who Called for Protests," *Human Rights Watch*, February 4, 2011.

¹⁶⁸ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic* (UN General Assembly, Seventeenth Special Session, A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1, November 23, 2011), 8.

This timeframe marks the initiation of the Syrian uprising although the protests remained mostly localized in one of Syria's 14 governorates, Dara'a, a few demonstrations were held outside of this area as well. Since the government's security apparatuses were not accustomed to dealing with citizen's defiant behavior, as no one normally dared to speak out against the regime for fear of the consequences, they were ill-equipped with the knowledge needed to properly mitigate many of these early situations. Instead they resorted to their normal courses of action that they were used to when dealing with even the slightest form of dissent which was to contain the protest movements by all means necessary. This stage highlights how the regime's repression techniques against peaceful protesters slowly started to evolve from nonviolent tactics to ones that were more aggressive and indiscriminate in nature which also caused the signals from external actors to shift as they began sending more signals expressing their deep concerns at the deteriorating situation in the country that were not in favor of the regime.

A little over a week later on March 16th, around 150 human rights activists and relatives of detainees congregated outside the Ministry of Interior in Damascus to publically demand the release of the country's political prisoners but within a matter of minutes, security forces disguised in plain clothing began attacking them with batons. By the time that this rally had been dispersed, 34 people had been detained for their participation.¹⁶⁹ This marked one of the first instances that the regime overtly violated people's right to freedom of assembly by using violent and selective repression tactics as they publically assaulted protesters outside one of the government's main institutions.

Two days later on the 18th, mass demonstrations were held in Dara'a to signify residents' unity in their shared feeling of utmost repugnance at the government for not yet releasing the schoolboys who had been arrested two weeks earlier. The movement began after Friday morning prayers at al-Omari mosque and security officers initially began assaulting people with batons but when that failed to quell the rising tensions they methodically aimed water cannons directly into the crowd to disperse the protest. By the end of the day they had opened fire on unarmed demonstrators leaving a few killed and

¹⁶⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011: Syria* (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2012), 16.

dozens injured. These actions are all categorized as violent and selective repression techniques as protesters were the ones being targeted with violent force. While all of this was happening, other military troops were dispatched to Dara'a to seal off the city, allowing people to leave but prohibiting anyone from entering.¹⁷⁰ This was one of the regime's beliefs that by restricting people's access to Dara'a they could avert political chaos from spreading elsewhere throughout the country. It also qualifies as a type of indiscriminate and nonviolent repression method as all Syrians, not just a select few, were prevented from entering the city, thus hindering their ability to move freely as they please. Additionally, as a gesture of goodwill, the 15 school children were finally released to their families after spending nearly two weeks in jail. But what was hoped to end the mounting animosity towards the al-Assad regime, only inflamed the already tense situation, as the mere sight of the children's severely beaten, bruised and burned bodies was the fuel that sparked the protest movements to grow like wildfire. Therefore, this is why the original categorization of their arrest as a case of nonviolent and indiscriminate repression is now classified as indiscriminate and violent because their disfigured physiques clearly showed that they had been extensively tortured during their incarceration.¹⁷¹

As the day came to a close, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made one of his first public announcements addressing the current situation in Syria. He stressed that the use of such deadly force against peaceful protesters and their capricious arrests would not be tolerated which is why he strongly urged the Syrian authorities to cease these types of actions against their own citizens immediately.¹⁷² This is classified as a neutral cheap signal as it was not openly condemning the Syrian regime's security forces activities but rather served as a warning sign to them if they failed to take this advice into serious consideration.

¹⁷⁰ "Syria: Government Crackdown Leads to Protester Deaths," *Human Rights Watch*, March 21, 2011.

¹⁷¹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011: Syria* (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2012), 5-6.

¹⁷² United Nations, Department of Public Information, *Concerned about Reported Killing of Protesters in Syria, Secretary-General Says Use of Lethal Force against Peaceful Demonstrators 'Unacceptable'* (SG/SM/13459, March 18, 2011).

On the 19th, thousands attended a funeral procession in Dara'a for two demonstrators that had been killed the day prior. But the police and military forces feared that such a large gathering of people would metastasize into another mass protest which is why they decided to discharge teargas on those in mourning. This use of unnecessary force against grieving civilians is classified as an instance of indiscriminate and violent repression. To add insult to injury, the government also disconnected all phone services throughout the entire city, both landlines and cell phones included, although they were restored later on the next day.¹⁷³ Preventing everyone in a specific town from being able to communicate with others residing outside of their area is a kind of indiscriminate and nonviolent repression tactic as their right to contact people at their own discretion is inhibited.

After the school children had been released and residents not only witnessed but were subjected to the brutality of the Syrian regime's security forces, the situation in Dara'a rapidly began to escalate. On the 20th rallies were staged throughout the city which were met with copious amounts of teargas and live ammunition from police officers and military troops, making this yet another instance where they security forces utilized selective and violent repression techniques to disband protest movements.¹⁷⁴ In addition, the government also started cracking down on people who were reaching out to foreign news media outlets to describe the current situation. During this day as well, they detained a man named Rami Sulayman, from a neighboring town of Dara'a for calling the BBC news station to describe the unraveling crisis and two days later on the 22nd, a similar incident occurred as Louay Hussein was arrested for his online activities in which he was prompting Syrians to actively take to the streets.¹⁷⁵ Both of these arrests are grouped together as instances of nonviolent and selective repression as the government was restricting their freedom of communication through various mediums such as online social forums or highly broadcasted international reports.

¹⁷³ "Syria: Government Crackdown Leads to Protester Deaths," *Human Rights Watch*, March 21, 2011.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ "Syrian Protest Detainees at Risk," *Amnesty International*, March 23, 2011.

On this day as well, the European Union decided to actively speak out against Bashar al-Assad's government as they openly condemned the security forces violent repression tactics, specifically citing their disgust at the use of live ammunition against unarmed demonstrators.¹⁷⁶ The press release also called on the Syrian authorities to halt their use of such brutal aggression towards their own citizens and opt for a more nonviolent approach to address their grievances instead of taking up arms against innocent civilians. This public announcement qualifies as a cheap and anti-regime signal as the whole European Union overtly denounced the actions of the regime's troops.

Midday on the 23rd, residents of Dara'a were gathered together in the al-Omari mosque that was being used as a makeshift hospital for the wounded at the time when security forces hurled teargas canisters inside and proceeded to enter while open firing on everyone inside, resulting in 8 deaths, one of which was a child.¹⁷⁷ Physically harming people while they are first of all not involved in protesting at the time of attack, second of all are tending to the injured and third of all are in a place of worship qualifies as a clear-cut case of indiscriminate and violent repression. Later in the evening, more protests erupted throughout the city and in the outskirts of town in small villages and both were met with teargas and live ammunition once again, adding this to the tally of the number of times the government's security services resorted to selective and violent repression techniques.¹⁷⁸

The more protests that began taking place in the city of Dara'a the more the security forces were instructed to use indiscriminate and violent repression tactics to contain the rallies from spreading else where throughout the country. But unlike the uprising in Bahrain, the situation in Syria was put on everyone's global radar as many more international, regional and domestic organizations started to comment on the unraveling crisis. On March 23rd, the Secretary-General issued his second condemnation

¹⁷⁶ European Union, *Declaration by High Representative, Catherine Ashton, on behalf of the EU on the Violent Crackdown on Peaceful Demonstrators in Syria* (8103/1/11 REV 1, European Union, March 22, 2011).

¹⁷⁷ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic* (UN General Assembly, Seventeenth Special Session, A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1, November 23, 2011), 11-12.

¹⁷⁸ "Syria: Security Forces Kill Dozens of Protesters," *Human Rights Watch*, March 24, 2011.

against the violent force being inflicted upon the peaceful demonstrators in Dara'a and called for an instant investigation to take place to hold those responsible for the killings accountable for such atrocities.¹⁷⁹ Additionally, the U.S. Department of State issued a public statement also condemning the al-Assad regime while simultaneously expressing their most sincere condolences to the families who had lost their loved ones due to the violent repression tactics of the government's security forces.¹⁸⁰ Both of these are grouped together and coded as instances in which cheap, anti-regime signals were sent against the reigning al-Assad family as the comments were clearly not made in favor of the government.

In Dara'a on the 25th, funerals were being held for civilians that had been slain by the regime's forces and people from one of Dara'a's three districts, Sanamein, attempted to enter the city to pay their respects alongside tens of thousands of mourners already in attendance. But on their way there they encountered troops who were blocking them from continuing on their way and when they refused to stop they opened fire on all of them.¹⁸¹ These more frequent uses of indiscriminate and violent repression tactics being carried out by the government's military, police and security services shows how they began escalating their techniques as more and more incidents like this one were occurring on an almost daily basis in which unarmed civilians who were not actively engaged in protesting at the time of attack were targeted. Also during this time, citizens started to behave in a more aggressive manner, as two incidents were reported, the first in which a few protesters tried to destroy a statue of the former President, Hafez al-Assad and the second which occurred a day later on the 26th where demonstrators attempted to set ablaze the headquarters of the ruling Baath Party and a police station.¹⁸² This highlights how the dynamic interaction between the regime and protesters began to escalate as both were now becoming more aggressive towards one another, not just simply the government anymore.

¹⁷⁹ United Nations, Department of Public Information, *Secretary-General Condemns Violence in Southern Syria, Urges Investigation* (SG/SM/13472, March 23, 2011).

¹⁸⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Violence in Syria* (March 23, 2011).

¹⁸¹ "Syria: Security Forces Fire on Protesters," *Human Rights Watch*, March 28, 2011.

¹⁸² Ibid.

By the end of the month, around 93 citizens were detained and being held incommunicado detention and at least 99 people were reported to have been killed by the government's security apparatuses.¹⁸³

On the first day of April, demonstrations were held in other areas outside of Dara'a, showing how the uprising was gaining more momentum as protests began spreading to various parts of the country. In the city of Douma, in the Damascus governorate, police and mukhabarat forces responded to a rally by launching teargas canisters into the massive crowds of people and opened fire at the nonviolent demonstrators, resulting in at least 8 known casualties.¹⁸⁴ The continued use of violent force against peaceful protesters are more instances that are characterized as the use of selective and violent repression tactics as they are aimed at people who are merely trying to exercise their right to freedom of assembly.

Theme of Phase One of the Uprising

The first theme of the Syrian uprising is very similar to that of Bahrain's, as this period emphasized how the regime's repression tactics began to shift away from more nonviolent methods in favor of ones that were aggressive and indiscriminate in nature but that also only succeeded in upping the momentum of the protest movements. But it was dissimilar to the uprising in Bahrain regarding the signals from external actors as most of the international community was much quicker to condemn the al-Assad regime's security forces actions than they were in Bahrain.

It was around March 18th that the demonstrations really started to take off as Dara'a residents were demanding the release of the schoolboys who had been detained two weeks earlier. The al-Assad regime decided that it would be in their best interest to free the boys and send them back home to their families. However, when their parents saw them for the first time since their arrest, it sparked mass outrage as their bodies showed signs of prolonged and severe torture. Shortly thereafter, the protests started multiplying daily as citizens were not only calling on the government to meet all of their

¹⁸³ "Syria: Further Information: Protestors released but Many still at Risk," *Amnesty International*, March 30, 2011.

¹⁸⁴ "Syria: Stop Shooting Protesters," *Human Rights Watch*, April 5, 2011.

political, economic and social needs, they now also demanded justice for the atrocities that were committed against defenseless children. As the regime was determined to keep these bouts of dissent localized to the city of Dara'a, the security forces were instructed to use any means necessary to do so, which is why during the following weeks their use of violent and indiscriminate repression tactics were becoming more widespread. Policemen and military troops systematically opened fire on people attending funeral processions, in places of worship and against unarmed civilians who were simply attempting to reach their friends and loved ones in Dara'a. These more frequent uses of indiscriminate and violent repression techniques are comparable to the tactics used by the security forces in Bahrain during the beginning phase of their uprising as well. In both cases, each government's use of these kind of repression methods only worked in escalating the energy of the protest movements as more and more civilians became active participants.

Although it is important to point out that the Syrian government utilized far crueller violent and indiscriminate repression tactics in addition to harsher nonviolent and indiscriminate methods as well when compared to what the Bahraini authorities carried out. The al-Khalifa family did not purposely target, detain and torture children or order blockades to be imposed around whole cities, preventing civilians from entering or exiting, as the al-Assad regime did. This is why there were a few documented incidents in which protesters were behaving violently, albeit not directly against the security forces but against more emblematic sites and places as they attempted to demolish a statue of the former President, Hafez al-Assad and attempted to set fire to the Baath Party's main office as well as a police station. This signifies how the dynamic interaction between the regime and its dissidents began to escalate as both were now becoming increasingly more aggressive towards one another. These limited occurrences foreshadowed the violence that would eventually ensue between the al-Assad government and its citizens, as indiscriminate repression tends to push protesters towards more militant strategies to achieve their desired goals and a state that continues to cast the net of repression widely is more and more likely to be viewed as illegitimate.¹⁸⁵ Also, this stage highlights how

¹⁸⁵ Mohammed M. Hafez and Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Violence as Contention in the Egyptian Islamic Movement," in *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 70.

the use of indiscriminate and violent repression caused more protests to erupt in small villages on the outskirts of Dara'a. Especially since by April 1st, the first large-scale rallies were held outside of this location and every single one was met with an over abundant use of violent force as the police and mukhabarat launched teargas canisters, rubber bullets and opened fire with live ammunition at all participants. This follows the hypothesized direction of protest movements according to escalation theory as the more indiscriminate the repression tactics of a regime are, the more likely it is to create incentives for mobilization.¹⁸⁶

What is also important to address in the first theme of the Syrian uprising is how prominent external actors and international governmental organizations denounced the actions of the al-Assad regime in a much quicker fashion when compared to their initial responses to the reigning al-Khalifa family's activities during the beginning stages of the uprising in Bahrain. Within a timeframe just short of a week, the United Nations, European Union and U.S. Department of State had all publically condemned the Syrian government and some expressed their deepest condolences to the families who had lost their loved ones to do the rising escalation of violence. They had also called to attention that the use of such force would not be tolerated by members of the global community or within their home states but when looking at their announcements towards Bahrain, they merely expressed mild concerns and hoped that a national dialogue would take place between the country's leaders and its main opposition. But the repression tactics of the ruling al-Assad regime during this first phase of the uprising were slightly more violent and indiscriminate than the Bahraini regimes were which caused an increase in the number of cheap anti-government signals to be sent against the Syrian government thus effecting the rate of escalation as dissidents began to notice that the regime did not seemingly have the support or backing from powerful international figures and therefore

¹⁸⁶ Joshua Rogers, "Shooting Citizens – Saving Regimes? A Case-Centered Approach to the Puzzle of Protest-Repression Interactions" (Working Paper No. 3, Center for North African and Middle Eastern Politics, Freie Universität Berlin, 2011), 14.

began to up their demands.¹⁸⁷ In a final attempt to ultimately spur potential challengers into submission the Syrian regime increased the brutality against protesters to a new level, as they were clearly not willing to offer any meaningful concessions in the near future.

Timeline of the Uprising – Phase Two (April 8 –April 24)

This stage marked a turning point as the Syrian regime's repression tactics became exceedingly brutal and more indiscriminate than before which in turn effected the momentum of the protest movements as they started to spread into neighboring governorates to the south and west of Dara'a. It was during this period as well that the signals from external actors were seldom as they were waiting to see if Bashar al-Assad would adhere to their previous advice and switch his security forces methods towards more nonviolent ones when dealing with the unarmed demonstrators.

A week later on April 8th, large demonstrations were held in two of the main villages in Dara'a, al-Mahatta and al-Balad. In both instances, the security service members responded with their usual tactics by tossing teargas canisters and opening fire into the large crowds of people.¹⁸⁸ But their weapon of choice this time to shoot at unarmed demonstrators was with Kalashnikovs, a lethal assault rifle that can either be set to single or automatic shot mode and when it is operating in the latter it can be fired at a rate of 600 rounds per minute although it can only hold up to 30 rounds at a time which will empty in just over 3 seconds.¹⁸⁹ Snipers were also systematically positioned throughout the area discharging their weapons at unsuspecting victims. The regime's decision to have the security forces use this type of lethal weaponry against defenseless protesters and have snipers deployed in the city is a primary example of how their selective and violent repression tactics began to spiral out of control. In addition to this, the troops set up a major roadblock on one of the main bridges between the two villages

¹⁸⁷ Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Kyle Beardsley, "Nosy Neighbors: Third-Party Actors in Central American Conflicts," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 3 (2004): 379.

¹⁸⁸ "Syria: Security Forces Barring Protesters from Medical Care," *Human Rights Watch*, April 12, 2011.

¹⁸⁹ Control Arms, "The AK-47: The World's Favorite Killing Machine" (Briefing Note, June 26, 2006), 3.

to prevent people from crossing over to reach one another. They also stopped all ambulances that were sent to the scene to retrieve the injured from doing so and surrounded several hospitals in the area, inhibiting people requiring urgent medical treatment to get the help they so desperately needed. Restricting people's freedom of movement, preventing medical personnel from tending to the wounded and stopping citizens that were hurt from entering hospitals are all categorized as indiscriminate and nonviolent repression tactics as those who were targeted were not actively engaged in protesting but were either simply trying to move about freely, perform their job's duties or receive medical assistance.

On the same day in Douma, officers sealed off the whole city, stopping anyone from entering or exiting because they feared that the events happening in Dara'a would provoke citizens in this town to follow suit as they had recently engaged in small scale protests themselves only a week earlier. Again, an instance of indiscriminate and nonviolent repression as everyone was either prevented from entering or leaving a specific area, although there were various accounts that stated the officers used violent tactics as well to stop people from passing through the town.

In one account, a witness told *Human Rights Watch* that three men all on one motorcycle reached the entrance of Douma only to encounter a large group of riot control units from the security forces who proceeded to tell them to turn around and go on their way. They followed orders and began to do so when all of a sudden one of the servicemen shot at them with his pistol.¹⁹⁰ This repression method in this case is branded as indiscriminate and violent as a security member discharged his weapon against people who were abiding by their commands and who posed no imminent danger to their lives. In another testimony, two doctors from Harasta, a suburb of Douma, told *Human Rights Watch* that they had tended to several protesters within the last few days as well as countless injured civilians, all of which had bullet wounds lodged in various parts of their bodies and many of them were also children.¹⁹¹ This shows how the repression tactics of the government were remaining extremely violent and becoming more and more

¹⁹⁰ "Syria: Security Forces Barring Protesters from Medical Care," *Human Rights Watch*, April 12, 2011.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

indiscriminate as not only protesters, but civilian bystanders and even children were hit with live ammunition.

The following day, on April 9th in the western governorate of Tartus, the regime's troops besieged yet another town, the coastal city of Baniyas as they set up multiple checkpoints to control the entry and exit to the city and in addition, they also decided to cut off all water supplies and electricity as well.¹⁹² After the events of the previous day, the government feared that people would start revolting here as they had begun to in Douma which is why they hoped this would pre-empt any attempted demonstrations from arising here. Hindering access to a city is, as previously stated, a type of indiscriminate and nonviolent repression method but it highlights how the government was applying harsher measures in doing so by stopping citizen's from having basic necessities such as water and electricity. By the end of the day, the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, spoke on their behalf when she proclaimed, "I strongly condemn the continuing violence and deaths in Syria in the context of protests calling for freedom and democracy. I sincerely regret the loss of life, particularly in the Southern city of Daraa, and extend my condolences to the families of the victims. I urge in the strongest terms the Syrian authorities to immediately put an end to the violence."¹⁹³ This statement is a cheap, anti-regime signal as the EU wanted to voice their unwavering stance against the repression tactics of the al-Assad regime by publically denouncing their activities once again.

Out of sheer panic, on the 21st, President Assad issued decrees to finally lift the State of Emergency that had been in place for 48 years, eradicate the state security courts and to officially recognize and regulate citizen's right to peacefully assemble.¹⁹⁴ But what he had sneakily added to these seemingly groundbreaking concessions was a final decree that allowed the security forces to hold a person who was suspected to be involved in certain crimes against the state from 1 to 7 days before allowing them access to a

¹⁹² "Syria: Rein in Security Forces After Violent Crackdown," *Amnesty International*, April 14, 2011.

¹⁹³ European Union, *Statement by the High Representative Catherine Ashton on the Violence in Syria* (April 9, 2011).

¹⁹⁴ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic* (UN General Assembly, Seventeenth Special Session, A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1, November 23, 2011), 9.

lawyer. These last-ditch efforts to appease the population was too little too late, as citizens had already witnessed the brutality of the regime's security forces and no one truly believed that anything was going to change for the better.¹⁹⁵

The next day, thousands of people in various parts of the country took to the streets showing that the concessions offered by the al-Assad regime were merely cosmetic in their minds and what they actually wanted was real reform not just simply the façade of change, in addition to justice for those who had been killed by the security forces while they were peacefully protesting. But not surprisingly, the government troops responded to the mass demonstrations that erupted in Douma, Homs, Damascus and Maadamiya by opening fire into the large crowds of people and in Khalidiyyah, a neighborhood in Homs, it was reported that military personnel were using Kalashnikovs to shoot at protesters.¹⁹⁶ In all of these cases, this type of brutal force is classified as violent and selective repression techniques as all of those who were targeted were actively engaged in protesting at the time of attack. In Ezraa, one of the three districts of the Dara'a governorate, witnesses described an incident in which officers were sniping victims from the top of a building which resulted in the death of a 7-year-old child along with three other young boys who were also hit in the head and died instantaneously. In the suburb of Othman, a witness told *Human Rights Watch* that they saw a 23-year-old man attempting to return home when mukhabarat forces told him to halt and as he proceeded to get off his bike, they shot him directly in the head.¹⁹⁷ Both of these instances qualify as indiscriminate and violent repression as those who were targeted were only children or merely trying to get home to their families when they were assaulted by these barbaric acts.

On the 23rd in Harasta, a neighborhood in the Douma district, peaceful demonstrations started to occur but were disbanded by the regime's security services who proceeded to open fire at the unarmed participants which qualifies this as an instance of violent and selective repression. But months later, a former member of the Syrian

¹⁹⁵ "Syria: Further Information: Arrested Protestors Report Torture," *Amnesty International*, April 21, 2011.

¹⁹⁶ "Scores Killed in Syria as 'Great Friday' Protests are Attacked," *Amnesty International*, April 22, 2011.

¹⁹⁷ "We've Never Seen Such Horror: Crimes Against Humanity by Syrian Security Forces," *Human Rights Watch*, June 1, 2011.

Republic Guard named Walid ‘Abd al-Karim al-Qash’ami told *Amnesty International* that he was condemned to death in Syria as he refused to shoot at protesters on this day after witnessing soldiers indiscriminately execute three children and a young man and women. He said, “One of the children was shot in the head by an officer who was standing right in front of me. I heard the officer say that he shot the kid because he was annoyed with his constant crying.”¹⁹⁸ During this day, funeral processions were held in Douma, Barza and Ezraa and those in mourning were shot at by the regime’s security forces, branding this as another act of indiscriminate and violent repression as people were targeted while they were paying their respects for those they had lost.¹⁹⁹

Theme of Phase Two of the Uprising

The theme of this stage of the uprising is that the indiscriminate and violent repression tactics of the Syrian regime became even more exceedingly brutal than before which in turn caused the one thing the government feared the most to happen, which is that the protest movements spread even further into neighboring governorates and not just in nearby villages of Dara’a anymore. Throughout this phase, the security forces methods for disbanding protests were similar to the Bahraini regimes security forces although as time progressed, the Syrian government decided to use lethal weaponry and snipers against demonstrators and eventually on unsuspecting civilians as well. But the signals from external actors were few and far during this phase as it acted as a kind of incubation period because the international community was waiting to see if the Syrian regime would adhere to their advice as the Bahraini regime did during the first portion of the second phase of their uprising.

At first, the police and military troops consistently resorted to launching teargas canisters into large crowds of people and opened fire with live ammunition, which was in line with the tactics utilized by the Bahraini security forces. They also prevented ambulances from reaching the wounded and injured civilians from entering hospitals to receive medical treatment which was also comparable to the methods employed in Bahrain. But on April 8th, the regime’s security apparatuses used deadly assault rifles,

¹⁹⁸ “Syrian Soldier ‘Ordered to Fire’ on Peaceful Protesters,” *Amnesty International*, June 9, 2011.

¹⁹⁹ “Syria: World Should Impose Sanctions on Leadership,” *Human Rights Watch*, April 24, 2011.

Kalashnikovs, to fire at unarmed demonstrators and innocent civilians who were approaching them, in addition to snipers who were shooting at unwary protesters and citizens throughout the day. The al-Assad regime's unwavering decision to use this kind of lethal weaponry against peaceful protesters and innocent civilians, on top of having snipers methodically placed throughout towns clearly highlights how the indiscriminate and violent repression tactics began to inch towards the point of no return. But despite this aggressive use of violent force against them, Syrians were unrelenting as these tactics only continued to enflame their rage towards the regime, especially at the ease in which the regime carried out such gross violations of human rights and other unspeakable atrocities against civilians, young children and the elderly.

The security forces use of indiscriminate and violent repression was evolving into a clear, patterned reaction as reports began to multiply which thoroughly described how these troops were either aimlessly firing on civilians, shooting directly at people who were trying to obey their orders or killing people simply because they were on their nerves. Also, several doctors relived the days when they received many dead bodies, all of which had been shot many times and several of the corpses they got were of young children, further elucidating the regime's lack of basic humanity. Finally, President Assad attempted to offer concessions in hopes of halting the rapidly increasing momentum of the uprising, but as in the same case of Bahrain, they did little to appease the population as they had already born witness to the atrocities the regime was capable of and demanded justice for those injured and killed. Therefore, although the Bahraini and Syrian regimes both initially responded to the protest movements with violent aggression that was mostly indiscriminate in nature, overtime the tactics of al-Assad's security forces became increasingly more deadly and widespread whereas the Bahraini government at least tried harder to offer meaningful concessions to its citizens. It is during this phase in which the repression techniques of both regimes initially start to shift further away from one another. As this stage of the uprising came to a close, although external actors only rarely took a position during this period, the signals that were sent were all cheap, anti-regime ones that overtly condemned the actions of the al-Assad government. This foreshadowed what was to come in the final stage of the uprising which would highlight how the increase in the use of indiscriminate and violent

repression tactics prompted external actors to send a multitude of cheap anti-government signals that increased the likelihood that mutual negotiations would be reached between the government and its opposition. According to signaling theory, cheap signals matter in bargaining processes and normally, when third parties offer cheap signals in favor of the government, it is the oppositional forces that accede some of their demands which gives the regime the upper hand.²⁰⁰ But in this case, as the signals that were sent were more in favor of the opposition, it decreased their willingness to bargain with the government and opt for incurring the costs of engaging in violent conflict with the regime instead.

Timeline of the Uprising – Phase Three (April 25–September 30)

It was during this stage of the uprising that the regime's indiscriminate and violent repression tactics had reached their apex, as the protest movements had spread beyond the localized provinces and into several surrounding cities throughout the country. The security forces met all the demonstrations with the same exceedingly sadistic measures that they were used to employing before when they successfully eliminated any traces of government opposition. It was also during this stage that external actors became remarkably vocal in their condemnation of the al-Assad regime as they started to threaten them with sanctions as well as alluding to the fact that the international community was willing to aid the anti-government forces should push come to shove.

On April 25th, severe anguish consumed Syria as the security officers unleashed their most oppressive tactics to date. They completely encapsulated the city of Dara'a by occupying every neighborhood within the city and ordered everyone to remain inside their homes which had their electricity, internet and phone services totally cut off.²⁰¹ This siege lasted for 11 days straight, during which all humanitarian aid, such as copious supplies of medicine and food, were also prevented from reaching the residents. All of these actions are grouped as indiscriminate and nonviolent repression tactics as a whole

²⁰⁰ Joseph Farrell and Matthew Rabin, "Cheap Talk," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 10, no. 3 (1996): 107.

²⁰¹ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic* (UN General Assembly, Seventeenth Special Session, A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1, November 23, 2011), 8.

city was prevented from freely moving about, in addition to being denied the right to have basic necessities available to them such as water and electricity, as well as restricting people from bringing them humanitarian supplies to ease the burden of being under government lockdown. To top it all off, snipers were stationed with heavy machine guns all around the city on top of buildings that were instructed to open fire on anyone approaching them or those who dared to defy the ban on movement and chose to leave their houses.²⁰² This qualifies as indiscriminate and violent repression because shooting at innocent civilians for simply leaving their place of residence is not something that warrants this kind of brutal response from people's own government.

On the 25th as well, the rapidly increasing levels of violent and indiscriminate repression prompted the UN Secretary-General to once again overtly denounce the brutal aggression being inflicted upon unarmed demonstrators, although he did acknowledge Bashar al-Assad's lifting of the State of Emergency that had been in place for 48 years, he still adamantly maintained that an effective dialogue must be taken with the regime and its opposition immediately.²⁰³ Two days later on April 27th, various member states of the United Nations took to the floor to continue their criticism and condemnation of Bashar al-Assad's regime. The United States representative to the UN called on the Syrian government to "change course now" and staunchly stated that the international community must stand behind this goal and if the violent repression was not instantaneously halted that America was going to implement a wide range of sanctions on the country. The United Kingdom's representative to the UN, Mark Lyall Grant also condemned the regime without any reservation and said that his country was also considering targeted sanctions against specific high-ranking members of the Syrian regime if the violence did not end. Lastly, France's representative, Gérard Araud, joined in on denouncing the actions of the Syrian government's security forces against peaceful protesters, human rights activists and journalists. Several other country representatives voiced their disapproval of the regime's repression tactics but did not outright condemn

²⁰² "Syria: Lift the Siege of Daraa," *Human Rights Watch*, May 5, 2011.

²⁰³ United Nations, Department of Public Information, *Secretary-General Condemns Syria Killings, Calls for End to Violence* (SG/SM/13521, April 25, 2011).

the government as a whole.²⁰⁴ Also on this day, the United States issued a press release which denounced in the strongest manner possible the repugnant repression techniques being utilized by the Syrian government on their own people while announcing that they were going to respond to the outrageous and continuing use of violent and indiscriminate repression with targeted sanctions.²⁰⁵ All of these statements are classified as cheap and anti-regime signals because they were openly and harshly critical of the al-Assad regime and the threatening of targeted sanctions fits under the category of cheap because it attempts to pressure Syria into getting in line with their demands or else face the consequences.

Four days later on the 29th, thousands from towns surrounding Dara'a attempted to break the blockade but as they reached the Sayda residence complex, the military forces ambushed them by indiscriminately firing live ammunition into the massive scores of civilians which in the end led to at least 40 known casualties that included women and children.²⁰⁶ The high number of fatalities on this day provoked President Obama to sign an Executive Order that imposed targeted sanctions against specific Syrian officials that had committed gross human rights abuses that were now occurring at an alarming rate throughout the entire country against the majority of the population.²⁰⁷ President Obama also condemned Bashar al-Assad's regime for ignoring the calls to end the brutality against his own citizens. Also, the United Nations issued a public statement that unequivocally denounced the Syrian governments use of deadly force against unarmed protesters and criticized how they prevented demonstrators from having access to urgent medical treatment as well.²⁰⁸ These instances qualify as cheap and anti-regime signals

²⁰⁴ United Nations, Department of Public Information, *Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Briefs Security Council on Syria, Says 'Repression Is Not the Solution;' Inclusive Dialogue, Reform Needed* (SC/10235, April 27, 2011).

²⁰⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Remarks at a Security Council Briefing on Syria* (April 27, 2011).

²⁰⁶ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic* (UN General Assembly, Seventeenth Special Session, A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1, November 23, 2011), 11.

²⁰⁷ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, *Fact Sheet: Executive Order Due to Syrian Human Rights Abuses* (April 29, 2011).

²⁰⁸ UN Human Rights Council Resolution S-16/1, *The Current Human Rights Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic in the Context of Recent Events* (A/HRC/S-16/1, April 29, 2011).

that were sent as restrictions were placed on various members of the al-Assad government, in addition to the ongoing condemnation of their atrocious actions.

It did not take long until the next press release from the U.S. Department of State to be released on May 6th, which once again condemned in the strongest possible terms the actions of the Syrian government over the course of the last month and a half. But unlike before, they started to up their threats as the announcement proclaimed that Bashar al-Assad's security forces violent repression tactics were, "Neither those of a responsible government nor a credible member of the international community."²⁰⁹ It also stated that the American government was willing and ready to work unilaterally and multilaterally with its international partners to develop a comprehensive plan that would be the most effective should the Syrian regime decide not to abandon its current violent path. This statement is classified as an extremely cheap, anti-government signal as it was one of the first instances in which the Syrian regime was described basically as illegitimate and foreshadowed what was to come as the country was seemingly not going to comply with the demands of the global community.

On May 7th, security forces entered the town of Tafas by firing aimlessly into the air in order to scare people into their homes and an incident occurred in which snipers stationed methodically on a rooftop opened fire on a group of civilians leaving the market place. Also, later in the day around 100 people tried to escape the village through Yarmuk valley but were hunted down like animals by military personnel who also proceeded to open fire on them.²¹⁰ On May 9th, similar tactics were employed in Baniyas as security officers using tanks fired shells into the residential area of Ras al-Naba and killed four people.²¹¹ The incidents that occurred on both of these days are grouped together and classified as more cases in which the regimes many security apparatuses utilized indiscriminate and violent repression tactics against unarmed civilians.

²⁰⁹ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, *Statement by the Press Secretary on Violence in Syria* (May 6, 2011).

²¹⁰ "We've Never Seen Such Horror: Crimes Against Humanity by Syrian Security Forces," *Human Rights Watch*, June 1, 2011.

²¹¹ "Syria: Death Toll Rises as City is Placed Under Siege," *Amnesty International*, May 9, 2011.

In the Homs governorate district of Tell Kalakh on the 15th, a devastating campaign of violent and indiscriminate repression was carried out by the regime's security forces as several atrocious incidents ranging from murder, torture, random arrests and severe denials of basic civil liberties were reported.²¹² All of these actions were taken deliberately to cause immense suffering to citizens mental and physical wellbeing. Around two weeks later on April 29th, the military forces again proceeded to march through the towns of Talbiseh, Deir Ba'albeh, Teir Ma'alleh and Rastan with tanks that had machine guns mounted on them which began shelling and shooting at civilian's private residences.²¹³

As the weeks progressed and the Syrian regime was not backing down or acceding to the calls from the global community to end their violent repression tactics against peaceful protesters and innocent civilians, various international organizations and heads of state actively denounced Bashar al-Assad's government in numerous press releases and public speeches as well as taking concrete actions against the country by imposing more crippling sanctions. On May 18th, the European Union took drastic steps to attempt to get the Syrian regime to change their policies regarding the use of repression to subdue the ongoing demonstrations with the hopes of promoting a democratic process instead by implementing an arms embargo against the regime.²¹⁴ The next day President Obama gave a very significant speech addressing U.S. policies in the Middle East and North Africa in which he made a number of statements that were extremely telling about America's future intentions for the al-Assad regime. The usual condemnations were made against the security services use of force but what was different about this public announcement was that President Obama bluntly stated, "President Assad now has a choice: He can lead that transition, or get out of the way."²¹⁵

²¹² "Crackdown in Syria: Terror in Tell Kalakh," *Amnesty International*, July 2011.

²¹³ "We've Never Seen Such Horror: Crimes Against Humanity by Syrian Security Forces," *Human Rights Watch*, June 1, 2011.

²¹⁴ European Union, *Declaration by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, on Behalf of the European Union, on the Unfolding Situation in Syria* (9512/2/11 REV 2, May 18, 2011).

²¹⁵ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, *Obama's Speech on U.S. Policies in Middle East and North Africa* (May 19, 2011).

These two statements are characterized as cheap, anti-regime signals as they clearly were made against the al-Assad regime as both openly condemned the security forces atrocities and President Obama signaled that Assad was finished if he continued to carry on as so. A few days later on May 23rd, the European Union adopted new strategies hoped to effectively deal with Syria as the Union agreed to suspend all preparations that were being made regarding new bilateral cooperation programs with the country, in addition to suspending all current bilateral programs that were already in place under the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument that were tailored to help build relations specifically with Mediterranean countries.²¹⁶ They also extended their restrictive measures to include more people close to the regime as well as President Bashar al-Assad himself. Finally, the EU proudly proclaimed that they would not be shy to take further action necessary should the leadership still continue to not change its current path.

Therefore, on June 2nd, President Bashar al-Assad announced the creation of the National Dialogue Commission that was tasked with the responsibility of preparing consultations between opposition groups but several boycotted this attempt at establishing a transitional process towards a multiparty democracy due to the continued violence used against nonviolent demonstrations and innocent civilians.²¹⁷

During June 20th, protests were held in al-Khalidiyah but were met with teargas and live ammunition from the security forces which makes this an instance where violent and selective repression methods were used in attempts to quell the momentum of the movements from gaining any further strength.

Now although the regime was trying to act as if they were committed to ending the use of ongoing violence against demonstrators, on July 2nd, President Assad fired the governor of Hama, Ahmad Khalid Abdel Aziz, for neglecting to repress a massive, peaceful protest at al-Assi square.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ European Union, Foreign Affairs Council, *Press Release* (10440/11, May 23-24, 2011).

²¹⁷ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic* (UN General Assembly, Seventeenth Special Session, A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1, November 23, 2011), 9.

²¹⁸ "Syria: Shootings, Arrests Follow Hama Protest," *Human Rights Watch*, July 6, 2011.

In the Qatana district of the Damascus governorate on July 16th, the regime resumed their indiscriminate and violent/nonviolent repression tactics by imposing an 11AM curfew on all of the towns inhabitants, cut off their water and electricity and conducted house-by-house raids in which they arbitrarily arrested numerous people and continued to fire on residential areas injuring a number of civilians.²¹⁹ Three days later on the 19th, pro-government militias and security forces targeted people attending a funeral near the Khalid bin al-Waleed mosque in Homs with automatic weapons that were mounted on top of vehicles. On the 21st, officers blocked off the village of Bab ‘Sba and opened fire at pedestrians trying to enter the town and reports surfaced that described how snipers shot at those on bicycle and others attempting to bring food and medicine to the residents.²²⁰ On this day as well, troops sealed off multiple neighborhoods throughout the Homs, restricting people’s freedom of movement, a kind of indiscriminate and nonviolent tactic that was so frequently utilized by the security forces.

By July 29th, the Free Syrian Army had formed.²²¹

About a week after this, the Gulf countries finally started to take serious action against President Assad’s most recent brutal crackdown. On August 7th, Saudi Arabia’s former ruler, the late King Abdullah recalled his ambassador from Syria, prompting Bahrain and Syria to follow suit only hours later as they also withdrew their envoys from the country as well.²²² The next day, King Abdullah condemned the Syrian regime and proclaimed in a written statement, “What is happening in Syria is not acceptable for Saudi Arabia. Syria should think wisely before it’s too late and issue and enact reforms that are not merely promises but actual reform. Either it chooses wisdom on its own or it will be pulled down into the depths of turmoil and loss.”²²³ Both of these instances

²¹⁹ “Syria: Torture Fear for Dozens Arrested in Damascus Suburb,” *Amnesty International*, July 18, 2011.

²²⁰ “We Live as in War: Crackdown on Protesters in the Governorate of Homs, Syria,” *Human Rights Watch*, November 11, 2011.

²²¹ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic* (UN General Assembly, Seventeenth Special Session, A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1, November 23, 2011), 9.

²²² “Saudi Arabia Recalls Syria Envoy as Assad Defends Crackdown,” *Dawn*, August 8, 2011.

²²³ “Saudi Arabia Calls for Syrian Reforms,” *Al Jazeera*, August 8, 2011.

qualify as cheap, anti-regime signals as removing ambassadors to the country sends a clear message to the opposition that the government is no longer an acceptable authority in which their states are willing to conduct business with.

A good amount of time had passed and the atrocities were only mounting as the Syrian regime was becoming more brutal as every day went by and the oppositional forces were engaging in violent clashes with the security forces as well. In a speech on September 21st, President Obama made it clear that the al-Assad regime was no longer the legitimate ruling authority in the eyes of America. In his most striking statement yet he said, “The Syrian people have shown dignity and courage in their pursuit of justice -- protesting peacefully, standing silently in the streets, dying for the same values that this institution is supposed to stand for. And the question for us is clear: Will we stand with the Syrian people, or with their oppressors?..... There's no excuse for inaction. Now is the time for the United Nations Security Council to sanction the Syrian regime, and to stand with the Syrian people.”²²⁴ This concluding remark by President Obama is a cheap and anti-government signal as it openly states that they are done trying to work with the government anymore as they were continuously unwilling to implement any meaningful change towards a national dialogue aimed at a democratic transition to adhere to the demands of its citizens.

Theme of Phase Three of the Uprising

The theme of this phase of the uprising is that the repression tactics of the regime, which had reached their most inhuman level yet during this period, combined with the dramatically increasing statements from external actors that are classified as cheap, anti-regime signals, essentially caused local defense committees and the Free Syrian Army to form as citizens wanted to protect themselves and their families from the brutalities of the government. But despite the creation of these organizations that were comprised of regular civilians and military defectors, the al-Assad regime continued to conduct their vicious repression methods with the same sadistic vigor as before.

²²⁴ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, *Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly* (September 21st, 2011).

The oppressive tactics included placing a number of cities on lockdown, sometimes for weeks on end, which was the case in Dara'a as security forces blockaded off the entire town to prevent civilians from entering and exiting as well as prohibiting humanitarian supplies of food and medicine to be brought in for the residents. They also held various towns throughout the Homs governorate under siege and in the city of Qatana, they implemented an 11AM curfew and restricted civilians access to water and electricity. In all cases where entire towns were sealed off from the rest of the population, the military troops conducted abhorrently indiscriminate and violent repression techniques as they regularly targeted residential areas with live ammunition initially as a scare tactic that evolved into a regular repression method, snipers opened fire on any person who dared to disobey their orders to remain indoors and they conducted door-to-door raids, arbitrarily arresting anyone suspected of supporting or being involved in demonstrations. In addition, the number of testimonies regarding the brutality of the regime became increasingly more frequent and disturbing to hear as the security forces were becoming more ruthless by the day as several accounts described how they opened fire on anyone without taking care if there were women and young children present. According to a dataset from the Political Terror Scale, for the year 2011 the repression tactics of the Syrian regime were coded as the highest level five. This means that the level of terror and brutality encompassed the majority of the population and those in powers have no qualms with utilizing any means necessary to subdue their opposition.²²⁵ This is in stark contrast to the Bahraini regimes code of a level three in which more arbitrary arrests and unfair trials took place instead of such abhorrent uses of force against their own citizens.

But despite the escalation in the level of brutality, the protests continued to go on even as the government engaged in mass torture and ongoing killings of unarmed demonstrators and defenseless civilians. By June, a group of defectors from the Syrian Army announced the formation of the Khalid bin Walid Brigade that fought against members of the Syrian security forces. One resident of the Bab Sba' village told Human Rights Watch that, "these committees that are formed by neighborhood youths are here to

²²⁵ Mark Gibney, Linda Cornett, Reed Wood, Peter Haschke and Daniel Arnon, *The Political Terror Scale 1976-2015* (2015), <http://www.politicalterroryscale.org>.

protect us from the shabiha shooting randomly at us; to ensure that security forces do not kill us while we protest.”²²⁶ Therefore, many civilians supported and justified these assaults as they were carried out with good intentions to defend the peaceful protesters right to assembly as they were consistently met with unlawful attacks by the security forces. The formation of such groups highlights the fact that the repression tactics adopted by the Syrian regime had resulted in a dangerous escalation of violence and by the end of this phase of the uprising a large number of military defectors had organized themselves into the “Free Syrian Army”.²²⁷

The increased severity in the indiscriminate and violent repression tactics carried out by the Syrian regime’s various security forces differs from the Bahraini regime’s use of force as by this time in the small Gulf country, the type of repression that was carried out was nowhere near the gross level of violence inflicted by the al-Assad regime against unarmed protesters and innocent bystanders. In addition, this caused the number of cheap anti-government signals in the Syrian case to be significantly greater compared to the few instances in which external actors denounced the Bahraini regimes actions. This is why no armed anti-government groups were established in Bahrain but explains why they formed in Syria. As the continued use of indiscriminate and violent repression persecuted the politically neutral masses as well as the anti-regime dissidents it caused them to join and support these armed opposition groups as they offered some protection from the government.²²⁸ As the signals from external actors remained cheap anti-government ones, it sent a clear message to the opposition that they would most likely receive support from their international allies should the uprising escalate even further. When this happens, it decreases the likelihood that dissidents will back down as the opposition now has the confidence needed to start to facilitate their attacks against the government’s troops.²²⁹

²²⁶ “We Live as in War: Crackdown on Protesters in the Governorate of Homs, Syria,” *Human Rights Watch*, November 11, 2011.

²²⁷ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic* (UN General Assembly, Seventeenth Special Session, A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1, November 23, 2011), 8.

²²⁸ Jason Lyall, “Does Indiscriminate Violence Incite Insurgent Attacks? Evidence from Chechnya,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 3 (2009): 335.

²²⁹ Brett Ashley Leeds, “Do Alliances Deter Aggression? The Influence of Military Alliances on the Initiation of Militarized Interstate Disputes,” *American Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 3 (2003): 428.

Whereas the signals from external actors throughout the Bahraini uprising had the opposite effect as they were cheap, pro-government ones that deterred open hostilities from transforming into a more dangerous situation.

So far, the escalation theory of civil war onset accurately describes how the situation in Syria was on the path towards the onset of civil war. As Jeff Goodwin stated in his book, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991*, “Armed insurgencies result from the violent suppression of the peaceful political activities of aggrieved people who have the capacity and opportunity to rebel.”²³⁰ Signaling theory also provided the backbone in understanding how third parties can also effect the momentum of protest movements towards the onset of civil war. When the regimes repression tactics are indiscriminate and violent it prompts external actors to send signals of support in an offensive way to regime challengers, making them more willing to engage in violent clashes with the state now that they feel they have the backing from their international allies.²³¹ And as the uprising progressed onwards it only continued to head down the inevitable path towards the onset of civil war.

²³⁰ Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 37.

²³¹ Brett Ashley Leeds, “Do Alliances Deter Aggression? The Influence of Military Alliances on the Initiation of Militarized Interstate Disputes,” *American Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 3 (2003): 437.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to explore the reasons behind the vastly different outcomes of the Arab Spring uprisings that took place in Bahrain and Syria. The independent variable of repression and the intermediate variable of signals from external actors were examined to see if they were the causal mechanisms that effected whether or not the momentum of the protest movements would lead to civil war onset or not. The two hypotheses put forth sought to show how the specific type (violent/nonviolent) and target (selective/indiscriminate) of repression combined with whether or not the signals from external actors were made in favor of the government or its opposition mattered in predicting instances in which a protest movement will metastasize to the onset of civil war.

Empirical Findings

The main findings that are thoroughly discussed throughout Chapter 4 and 5 clearly indicate that the type and target of repression are important precursors to monitor in assessing whether an uprising is in grave danger of escalating to civil war onset. It also showed how the type and intensity of repression impacted the kind of signals sent from external actors in regards to whether or not they were in favor of the regime or its opposition and whether they were cheap or costly which also contributed to impacting the direction of the protest movements.

In Bahrain, the results indicated how the initial use of indiscriminate and violent repression techniques upped the momentum of the protests as many more politically neutral and disengaged citizens decided to become actively involved in the anti-regime demonstrations. But interestingly enough, the signals from external actors during this period did not overtly condemn the violent aggression towards unarmed protesters and merely offered support to the ruling al-Khalifa family. The international community simply suggested that the government engage in a national dialogue with its' dissidents instead of continuing to use violent force against them. Although King Hamad took this advice, people's anger was still growing due to the initial use of violent and indiscriminate repression tactics that continued to drive more civilians to the streets in protest. As time passed and no meaningful negotiations had been reached and the

demonstrators were only becoming more disruptive, the Bahraini regime's security forces retreated back to their old methods as before. But this time, when they carried out their violent repression tactics they were more selective rather than indiscriminate in nature and they also conducted more nonviolent and indiscriminate techniques as well such as their mass arrest campaign. Therefore, this caused the signals from external actors to only mildly denounced the regimes repression tactics and they still remained reluctant to overtly condemn the government as a whole. Instead, prominent external actors kept offering their support to the Bahraini regime, letting the leaders know that they would be willing to step in on their side, should the situation get further out of hand.

While in Syria, the findings emphasize how the continued use of indiscriminate and violent repression methods which increased the number of cheap, anti-regime signals led to the onset of civil war. Initially, both regimes responded to the uprisings with violent and indiscriminate repression, but the difference is that the Syrian regime never chose to abandon these methods as the Bahraini authorities finally did. Because of this, many statements were made in support of the oppositional forces in Syria that alluded to the fact that they would receive backing from third parties should the situation continue to devolve. In this case, as the regime continued on its violent killing spree, not bothering to take into account who was going to be hurt, injured or killed by the security forces it only upped the momentum of the protest movements to the onset of civil war as armed anti-government groups started to form throughout the country.

Theoretical Implications

The inflammation hypothesis within escalation theory states that the onset of civil war is most likely when violent repression is carried out indiscriminately as it engenders the majority of the population to engage in actively demonstrating against the unjust measures being carried out by the state. While signaling theory predicts that when this type and target of repression is carried out it causes external actors to send cheap anti-government signals that cause the opposition to become more unwilling to reach mutual negotiations with the state as they believe that they have third party support should the regime continue to clamp down on their nonviolent activities. Both theories accurately

account for the reasons why Syria fell victim to an ongoing civil war while Bahrain was able to weather the storm.

Recommendations for Future Research

This thesis hopes to have added valuable findings to the civil war onset literature which will help policy makers and crisis prevention teams better predict not only where civil wars are likely to take place, but *when*. Repression type and whom it targets are crucial elements to be aware of when monitoring an escalating situation but it is also important to keep in mind that no longer are civil wars to be thought of as a merely domestic phenomenon and the roles of the international community can also effect rising tensions within countries as well.

Concluding Remarks

As civil wars have been the number one type of conflict for several years now, understanding the vast complexities believed to trigger this type of intrastate violence are crucial now more than ever. This thesis hopes to have added valuable information regarding more understudied factors that can also lead to this type of warfare.

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